COSMOPOLITANS IN CLOSE QUARTERS: EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE RANKS OF UMKHONTO WE SIZWE (1961-PRESENT)

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>APLA</td>
<td>African People’s Liberation Army</td>
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<td>APC</td>
<td>Area Politico-Military Committee</td>
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<td>BCM</td>
<td>Black Consciousness Movement</td>
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<td>CIO</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Office (Rhodesia)</td>
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<td>MCW</td>
<td>Military and Combat Work</td>
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<td>MHQ</td>
<td>Military Headquarters</td>
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<td>MK</td>
<td>Umkhonto we Sizwe</td>
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<tr>
<td>MKMVA</td>
<td>Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAT</td>
<td>Department of National Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>National Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSMS</td>
<td>National Security Management System</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organization of African Unity</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAFMESCA</td>
<td>Pan-African Freedom Movement for East, Central and Southern Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAAF</td>
<td>South African Air Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACP</td>
<td>South African Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SADET</td>
<td>South African Democracy Education Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>SANDF</td>
<td>South African National Defense Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDU</td>
<td>Self-Defense Units</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWAPO</td>
<td>South West Africa People’s Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITA</td>
<td>Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAPU</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African People’s Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZIPRA</td>
<td>Zimbabwean People’s Revolutionary Army</td>
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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

COSMOPOLITANS IN CLOSE QUARTERS: EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE RANKS OF UMKHONTO WE SIZWE (1961-PRESENT)

By

Stephen R Davis

May 6, 2010

Chair: Luise White
Major: History

My dissertation is a history of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress. This work is a multi-sited study of five different episodes that occurred during three decades of armed struggle inside and outside of South Africa. Each of these episodes offer opportunities to reflect on the ways this history has been written, suggest the reasons why some narratives are favored over others, as well as indicate pathways toward alternative retellings of this history. I explore these themes by weaving forty-five oral interviews into selections taken from seven thousand pages of documents and readings of published narratives, all in an effort to uncover histories of this army often displaced by official accounts. This project grew out my Masters thesis which investigated the historiography on the ANC in exile through the lens of radio broadcasting.
CHAPTER 1
THE GRAND NARRATIVE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY, AND UMKhONTO WE SIZWE IN EXILE

Umculo yeAK-47
uTambo uphi?
uTambo waye emqwwebedweni!
Wena uyarda amajoni indlela yempu.
Baza ukuhlangana, baza ukuphindla!
The AK-47 Song
Where is Tambo?
Tambo is in the bush!
Teaching the soldiers the art of the gun.
So that they will be one, so that they will come! \(^1\)

My dissertation is a multi-sited history of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress of South Africa. \(^2\) MK conducted a three decade long armed struggle against the apartheid state, beginning with its formation on December 16th, 1961 and ending with its demobilization in February of 1993. The objective of this history is to position historical inquiry behind contemporary mythologizations of the armed struggle. I examine five brief moments in great detail, the dissolution of an alleged guerrilla training camp in 1962, a frustrated guerrilla campaign in 1967, poisoning and espionage accusations in 1977, everyday life in the underground in Cape Town during the ‘long decade’ of the 1980s, and contemporary memorializations of the armed struggle. In each chapter I bring many of the concerns of microhistory to bear on very complex bodies of written and oral evidence, culled primarily from forty five interviews and several thousand pages of documents. This dissertation is not


\(^2\) The inspiration for my synthesis of this evidence came from many sources. “Madeliefies in Namakwaland” by Ingrid Jonker is one work that frames both my thinking towards oral and written evidence and my authorial intentions. Jonker, Ingrid, 1963. *Rook en Oker*. Cape Town: Struik.
simply another narrative history of MK, but rather a study of how experiences of
the rank-and-file are represented, and misrepresented, through various layers of
primary and secondary sources.

Likewise, this dissertation is not a conventional narrative history, in fact it is
deliberately written outside of these conventions. Each episode is placed in
chronological order, but as a whole these chapters do not describe a single
chronology of events. This is implicit argument against the tendency to view
mistake chronology for history, as well as an attempt to write around this
tendency. Instead of chronological narrative, I follow a broader definition of
history, one that includes historiographical explorations of sources, their
evidentiary effects and the consequences of statist grand narratives of the armed
struggle in contemporary South Africa. Further, I chose this pathway in order to
to avoid the flattening of evidence requisite in many of statist histories. The
chapters here essentially discuss the constructions of statist grand narratives,
detail the way evidence is evaluated, positioned and discounted in these sorts of
history. Further, along the way I point alternate versions of these episodes
rendered in oral and written evidence, suggest the possibility of reorganizing
evidence to construct different narratives in the future, and foreground some
efforts by ordinary persons who are presently working on their own
representations of the past. In each chapter I attempt to diagnose
historiographical problems, describe their characteristics, and begin to suggest
possible remedies.
Statist grand narratives is a rather cumbersome term that encompasses a local category of historical production. “Struggle history,” deployed in quotations throughout this text, is the locus of most of my critiques of statist grand narratives. “Struggle history” can be defined as a broad field of written, visual, and performative works that support the idea that there was one unitary anti-apartheid struggle, that this struggle conformed to the contemporary narrative of ‘liberation’ offered by the ruling party, and that it is necessary and good that histories thus written should support the legitimacy of the post-apartheid state. Further, ‘struggle histories’ often have one eye on the future, as much as they have one eye on the past. According to the rules of the genre, ‘struggle histories’ should also serve as didactic lesson books for dutiful students of the struggle that the state hopes to discipline. In this sense they are a form of public history via routinization, prepackaged narratives and ready to be distributed in easily consumed textbooks, pageants, and television documentaries. This didactic purpose serves the aims of the post-apartheid state not only because it proves the moral justification for the ruling party’s future legitimacy, but that it pins all hopes for a better life on one way of thinking about past struggles.

‘Struggle histories’ are most often written by participants in the struggle, but they can also be the product of professional academics, journalists or official hagiographers. Many participants have also become professional academics, journalists or official hagiographers, and often take great glee in confusing their authorial subject positions. A few have become professional historians, although most historians of South Africa not only are aware of these problems but
implicitly and explicitly write against these tendencies. This older generation aside, increasingly a younger generation of writers have discovered the genre of ‘struggle history,’ and realized that it is a fruitful avenue for advancing their careers. Funded by a massive state heritage infrastructure and healthy sales figures at retail booksellers, ‘struggle history’ is a great way not only to make your name known but also to secure a permanent place in the kingdom of patronage that governs heritage projects in South Africa.

My point in critiquing this cottage industry is not in blindly rejecting each of these premises, nor automatically demoting the histories built upon them, but to point out all of those opportunities where the formation of other narratives of the struggle are possible but are precluded by the rules that silently and not-so-silently guide this genre of writing. ‘Struggle histories’ come in many forms and fall prey to statist tendencies in varying degrees, but most, if not all, fail to create a ‘level playing field’ for contesting versions of the past. Further, most, if not all, fail to peel back the epistemological curtain on the complex bodies of evidence deployed to make claims on historical truth. If this dissertation does anything, it purports to allow for the free play of complex bodies of evidence, opens the production of historical knowledge up to the forces of contesting truth-claims, and demotes statist grand narratives. If and when I demote the statist grand narratives deployed in ‘struggle histories,’ I do so with these justifiable objectives in mind.

Having described the genre, what then does one do with the hundreds of struggle histories already on the shelves? Further, when do we treat these
books as secondary sources and when do we demote them to the status of primary sources? To introduce some of these issues I provide the following rubric that might distinguish ‘struggle history’ from academic history. Footnotes and indices largely differentiate academic history from other forms of writing. Further, a rigorous training in historical methods and practices also guides this form of writing or historically-minded oral testimony. This may or may not be formal Western education at an accredited university. ³ And a commitment to thorough and exhaustive research in written and oral evidence is another hallmark. Where ‘struggle history’ exhibits the characteristics it comes closer to academic history. This is not to devalue the information contained in ‘struggle history’ but to flag the claims so often made in the name of academic rigor. Finally struggle veterans can and do write academic histories, but being a struggle veteran alone does not qualify your writing as academic history.

Along these lines is the issue of ‘full disclosure.’ Martin Legassick, a struggle veteran with decades of experience working within and without the orbit of the African National Congress provided the best example of full disclosure of any academic history of the armed struggle.⁴ Although his piece The Armed Struggle and Democracy: The Case of South Africa has a clearly partisan take

³ Indeed some of the best academic histories featured here were transmitted to me orally by my interviewees during extended interviews. Many of these individuals may never convert their theorizations and evaluations and commentary into formal published academic histories.

on internal theoretical debates over the usefulness of certain concepts of armed struggle in the context of the anti-apartheid struggle. But his frank admission of being a loyal critic turned expelled dissident moves his writing out of the realm of ‘struggle history’ and into the genre of academic history. When other struggle veterans attempt similar disclosures, they may also transcend these generic boundaries or at least write more successful ‘struggle histories’. Less than successful ‘struggle histories’ do not index, footnote, or give full disclosure. Therefore they do not constitute academic history, and cannot be evaluated as secondary sources.

Beyond critique and evaluation, I use the concept of everyday life to peel away segments of the grand narrative to reveal the rich texture of evidence tired and over produced chronologies tend to paste over. Although the concept of everyday life is now suffering from a lack conceptual clarity, in my view it permits me a way of describing the complexities evident in oral and written evidence, and avoids the danger of flattening this evidence into two-dimensional set pieces. Everyday life is all of the details of lived experience that do not immediately fall within an authorized explanation of a given event. My evidence offered manifold examples of everyday life, discussions of the qualities of preferred uniforms in guerrilla training camps, the excitement of opening a banned book for the first time, or mourning a lost friend. This definition runs the risk of including everything and nothing at the same time, or allowing everyday life to be in the eye of the beholder. These critiques are valid and speak to ongoing debates over how to make this term relevant to historical research and writing. The only
qualifier I might add to my definition that might narrow it down a bit is the following: to paraphrase another theorist, everyday life is what happens when you are busy making other plans. In this case, ‘the other plans’ are the historicist ideas of progress and purpose that guided the actions of a very earnest set of guerrillas, cadres, and combatants. If one idea permeated the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe at different times and in different places, it was the idea that revolution was coming, and that the MK would be the vanguard of this coming revolution. When these plans fell through, and they fell through at different times and for different reasons, the details of everyday life filled the evidentiary vacuum, and provided me with a rich field for exploring the problems of ‘struggle history.’ Instead of easily extruded causal chains of events, we see history with all its rich contradiction, complexity, and irony. It comes as little surprise then, that everyday life provides the perfect foil for talking about histories and evidence displaced by the rules of the genre of struggle history.

The following is a summary of chapters that details the general themes of each episode. Each chapter summary is an attempt to provide a thumbnail sketch of how this episode illuminates the dilemmas, alternatives, and critiques discussed above.

Chapter Two takes place after the turn to armed struggle and the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), a nominally independent group composed of members of both the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party. When the Mamre camp was formed in December 1962, MK had already spent over a year orchestrating acts of sabotage throughout South
Africa. It was in this context that two MK members gathered together twenty-seven other individuals and pitched a camp outside Cape Town for two days. The purpose of this camp remains contested. Rather than define the camp as either a guerrilla training camp or an innocent holiday camp, I read these contestations for what they are; evidence of the different rhetorical uses that Mamre camp served at specific historical moments. To develop this argument I discuss how different commentators at different times dealt with two separate questions. How did the Mamre camp fit within the context of an increasingly militarized protest culture in Cape Town? What can and cannot be said about Mamre at different junctures? To do this I examine three bodies of evidence, trial transcripts, jail diaries, and oral histories. I look at the way the Mamre camp is positioned in each body of evidence and in explanations of the armed struggle.

Chapter Three takes place after the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and Umkhonto we Sizwe fled South Africa following the arrest of Nelson Mandela and other top leaders at the Rivonia farm in July 1963. These allied organizations formed a close partnership in exile, and worked together to continue the armed struggle. At this time, military strategists remained preoccupied with infiltrating trained cadres back into South Africa. Their objective was to create a transit route through Rhodesia, rebuild the underground within South Africa, and then embark on a second sabotage campaign. This thinking informed the Wankie Campaign, which was an attempt to establish a ‘Ho Chi Minh trail’ through western Rhodesia. The detachments deployed during the Wankie Campaign were quickly discovered, fought bravely,
and were then dispersed, captured or killed by security forces. The primary concern of this chapter is to describe and explain the way the history of this ‘heroic failure’ is written. All too often, writers have framed the Wankie Campaign in terms of winners and losers, and favored either written sources over oral sources, or vice versa. In this chapter I read both written and oral sources through the concept of visuality and the landscape. The end result is a history of the Wankie Campaign that focuses most closely on the experiences of guerrillas themselves, rather than assessing the campaign in terms of success or failure.

Chapter Four examines an alleged poisoning and aerial bombardment that occurred in 1977 and 1979 in a guerrilla training camp operated by the African National Congress. This chapter examines explanations of these events in two bodies of evidence, a series of investigative reports produced after incidents of infiltration, and an eyewitness account of the alleged poisoning left diary written by an instructor. These two layers capture two very different versions of these events. Investigative reports place these events at the head of a long chronology of infiltrations and assume that both were the work of agents. The diaries suggest that neither were the work of agents, the alleged poisoning was actually a case of food poisoning, and that the camp was in full view of passing trains on a nearby railway, making it an easily locatable target for the South African Air Force. This chapter examines how investigative reports close off the possibilities recorded in the diary entries. My argument, following literary criticism of the detective novel, is that the narrativity of investigative reports eliminated the alternative explanations found in this diary. Investigators charged with solving
crimes constructed narratives of infiltration, developed profiles of suspects, and then levied accusations. In the end, investigators could not complete an investigation without some reference to the alleged poisoning and aerial bombardment, and these events could only be thought of as the result of infiltration. This narrativity is preserved in published versions of the diary, which are heavily edited to exclude the eye witness accounts that trouble the authority of earlier investigations.

Chapter Five critiques two modes of writing on the underground, social history and ‘struggle history.’ I begin my critique by reviewing the theoretical concerns of social history and ‘struggle history’, and suggest that some of the concerns of microhistory will avoid many of the historiographical pitfalls of both modes. I support this critique and provide examples of an alternative mode of writing in three further sections. First I revisit Madeleine Fullard’s work on the practice of violence in Cape Town during the 1980s. This exhaustively empirical research is part of a distinct genealogy of writing that descends from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Fullard’s research in the forensic archive of casualties, and her recategorization of civilians and political actors provides a new basis for writing a microhistory of everyday life. From Fullard’s wide tableau, I then attempt to depict the local specificities of strategies of counterinsurgency and underground protest. I do this by reviewing of texts on Soviet doctrines on how to organize an underground, and reconstructing state theories of counterinsurgency. Readings of these texts informed underground perceptions of repression and resistance. The final section consists of three vignettes taken
primarily from interviews with former cadres of three different underground units active in Cape Town at three different historical junctures. I draw on my critique of social history and ‘struggle history’, the theoretical alternative offered by microhistory, and the empirical research on the practice of violence, to inform my reading of these complex testimonies.

Chapter Six is an examination of way the armed struggle is deployed in constructions of a post-apartheid national idea. This chapter covers the two decades since the negotiated settlement that ended the armed struggle and sidelined socialist redevelopment for free-market liberal democracy. In these precarious and ambiguous years, the African National Congress, struggled to maintain its credentials as a both liberation movement both as ruling party. This chapter uses public history as a window into how the official histories locate the armed struggle within the ‘national idea’ of post-apartheid South Africa.

My argument in this chapter is that efforts to articulate a post-apartheid national identity do not transcend the vocabulary of Afrikaner nationalism employed by the old apartheid regime. The African National Congress attempted to counter apartheid-era constructions of national identity by inverting the same terms used to articulate Afrikaner nationalism. As a consequence it struggled to speak without resorting to the militarized imagery and exclusionary language used by the previous regime. The difference between this older nationalism and the newer counter-nationalism is the moral valence assigned to these images and this language. On the one hand, the state needed to foreground the armed struggle to authenticate itself and its political vision of a new national identity. On
the other hand deploying heroic narratives of the armed struggle threatens to activate veterans’ claims on the state and unleash a new kind of politics of exclusion. This dilemma is most evident in the infrastructure of monuments that at once celebrate a generic armed struggle but strip it of specificities that trouble the new national narrative. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that the rich archive of personal memorialization is one way to bypass the amnesia induced by official monumentalizations of the armed struggle.

This chapter is an attempt to locate these discussions in wider bodies of literature. Specifically I attempt to place scholarship on public history written by South African historians, alongside analyses and critiques of nationalism in Europe, and literature on veterans, militarism and citizenship in the United States.

The purpose of this first chapter is to sketch the major events of the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) in exile, with specific reference to the activities of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK); the armed wing of both organizations. The exile period is crucial for contextualizing the following chapters because exile was the backlot from which the armed struggle was staged. The importance of the exile period is reflected in the voluminous treatment given to these years in scholarship, journalism and “struggle histories.” Despite the publication of a number of histories and memoirs devoted to the “exile experience,” these years remain shrouded in a mysterious aura of acronyms, pseudonyms, factional politics and personal agendas. Although MK cannot be explained without reference to the era of legality that
preceded the departure of political organizations from South Africa, the exile was
the back lot from which the set pieces of armed struggle were staged. One
cannot expect to understand the armed struggle without reference to exile, and
vice versa. The purpose of this chapter, again, is to frame the following episodes
within a narrative arc, as well as provide an example of why a dissertation
composed of episodes can do more than another narrative history of the armed
struggle positioned from exile looking inward.

The inability to express the armed struggle in narrative form partly stems
from the peripatetic existence endured by most exiles. South African liberation
organizations, like many other movements in Africa, inhabited a scattershot
constellation of African guerrilla camps, Western office buildings, Eastern-bloc
dachas, and hidden prison cells, with historical actors moving at any given time
from one location to the next, and back again. Often political and personal
divisions complemented and confused these physical divides.

Although all history is comprised of multiple experiences and perspectives,
the dispersal of South African exiles exaggerated this tendency to a seemingly
unworkable degree. As Mwezi Twala wrote of his experience in ANC camps in
the Angolan bush; “a cadre really only knew what was going on in his camp; he
did not know what was going on in other camps except by word of mouth and
news which was conveyed by truck drivers who brought supplies to the camps. It
was frequently difficult to separate fact from fiction”.5 Contrary to Twala’s
interpretation, memoirs and histories of exile usually make claims to some

Jonathan Ball Publishers. 150.
degree of comprehensiveness, while, more often then not, contradicting this aim by presenting a segmented understanding of the “exile experience.” Furthermore, these works often employ the triple conceit of telling “nothing but the truth” by revealing “the undercover struggle” from an “insider’s perspective”.\(^6\)

Whether marketing strategy, narrative strategy, or a combination of both, the effect of these histories is to suggest that a bedrock of experience exists and that it can be contained within a single text written by a single author. Based on my reading of these often frustratingly contradictory accounts, I argue that arriving at any “comprehensive truth” of the armed struggle is, at best, problematic, at worst, pointless. Nevertheless, there is value in placing these disparate narrative strands together—not in an attempt to cobble together some patchwork account, but rather, to see the myriad ways this history was written and rewritten. Placing the historical narrative of a dogged anti-communist, against that of a party stalwart, while aligning both against an account written by a dissident MK guerrilla, presents not only an intellectual challenge, but reveals the spaces, concealments, and silences that run through each perspective. The aim of this paper is to juxtapose opposing accounts of exile while tracing the rough contours of the nearly three decades the ANC, SACP and MK spent in exile.

The turn to violence that prefaced the creation of MK must be viewed in the context of the shifting political scene in late 1950s and early 1960s. During the

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1950s the ANC led a coalition of political parties, trade unions, and community organizations under the banner of the Congress Alliance. The aim of the alliance, as outlined in the Freedom Charter, was to achieve racial equality, democracy, and an ill-defined distribution of wealth.7 Their tactics included a combination of non-violent passive resistance and mass protest, most often taking the form of labor protests, stay-at-home strikes, boycotts, and civil disobedience.8 Although alliance members discussed the possibility of violence throughout this period, and in some instances laid the groundwork for later military campaigns, most believed exclusively non-violent means could achieve political change.9

The broad alliances and mass protests of the 1950s should not suggest that members shared any consensus beyond the ultimate aims of the struggle and the immediate range of tactics. Instead, the political terrain between various components of the alliance was wide and varied; containing at any given time a motley assortment of Marxists, white liberals, Africanists, and black bourgeois interests, with members assuming multiple guises, sometimes simultaneously. Aside from the ANC leadership itself, communists stood as the most cohesive and disciplined faction within this fluid political environment. Outlawed as a political organization since 1950, key members of the then-named Communist Party of South Africa, secretly reconstituted their organization as the South

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African Communist Party; a tightly organized, underground version of its predecessor.  

During the mass protests of the 1950s, SACP members joined a variety of organizations within the Congress Alliance, gaining a particularly disproportionate share of leadership posts within the left-leaning Congress of Democrats.

As the decade drew to a close, competition between various factions with the Congress Alliance intensified, as popular calls for change outstripped actual gains. In the excited atmosphere of early decolonization, demands for racial equality and democracy in South Africa became ever more urgent, with some openly articulating a political vision markedly different from that enshrined in the Freedom Charter. By 1959, this plurality became untenable, as a faction of Africanists within the ANC split with the organization over the principle of non-racialism and formed a rival organization, the Pan-Africanist Congress.

The PAC quickly attacked the eroding legitimacy of the ANC and the Congress Alliance. In a series of strikes and protests, the PAC and the ANC each attempted to discredit the populist credentials of their rival. The situation reached a climax on March 21, 1960 when the PAC staged a hastily arranged antipass

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campaign ten days ahead of one scheduled by the ANC.\textsuperscript{14} On that day, crowds gathered around a police station in Sharpeville, to protest pass laws by returning their hated dompas. Police fired upon the protesters, killing sixty-nine, and wounding countless others. In the wake of the Sharpeville massacre an already changing political environment accelerated beyond all expectations.

The government reacted to the Sharpeville massacre by outlawing both the African National Congress, as well as its rival, the Pan Africanist Congress, trying the leaders of both organizations for treason, arbitrarily arresting and detaining others, while subjecting the remainder to intense surveillance and harassment. In this context of this severe disruption and violent government repression, many within the ANC began to seriously question the future of an exclusively non-violent organization.\textsuperscript{15} In the summer of 1961, the Working Committee of the African National Congress met to discuss the issue of violence. Leading the case for violence was Nelson Mandela, who gained notoriety as the youthful face of ANC passive resistance campaigns during the 1950s. As Mandela recalled in his autobiography, advocates of violence did not want to replace other tactics of passive resistance, so much as complement the range of possibilities available to ANC leaders. Those arguing against Mandela suggested that violence would only invite further government repression, opening the possibility of future


massacres, and ultimately undermine more conventional tactics. Although sources differ over which circles actually endorsed violence versus non-violence, the Executive Committee eventually arrived at a compromise. The ANC itself would not accept violence as a new resolution, but would create a “separate and independent organ, linked to the ANC and under the overall control of the ANC, but fundamentally autonomous”.  

With this momentus decision, the ANC embarked upon a thirty year campaign of intermittent “armed struggle and sabotage” against the apartheid government. This new organization, dubbed Umkhonto we Sizwe, abbreviated as MK also established the first sustained administrative link between the SACP and the ANC, fostering a level of cooperation greater than previously enjoyed between the two organizations. In these early years, this collaboration was far from equal. Planners, black and white alike, carefully managed perceptions of white communist involvement by staffing conspicuous MK positions with prominent black leaders. Behind the scenes, white communists--many veterans of the Springbok Legion that served in the Second World War—trained new recruits in clandestine operations and sabotage techniques.  

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17 isiXhosa for ‘Spear of the Nation’. Recently scholars have begun to refer to Umkhonto we Sizwe by placing ‘the’ before it as in ‘the Umkhonto we Sizwe,’ Although I heard a few of my interviewees use this format, no one has offered a clear explanation of difference between referring to MK as just Umkhonto we Sizwe or ‘the’ Umkhonto we Sizwe. Clarification will no doubt come with further archival research and interviewing.  
of 1961, a regional structure emerged, with each group securing chemicals and explosives locally, through legal channels or by theft.19

Ronnie Kasrils, then a junior member of the Natal Regional Command, recalled that ultimate aim of these preparations was far from apparent, especially to those on the inside. Kasrils writes of the confusion; “...Were we aiming to simply put pressure on the government—to force it to change—or to overthrow it? If so, how? I perceived these questions only dimly at the time. In retrospect, from what Jack [Hodgson] and others told us, I came to realize that the strategy had not been clearly worked out”.20 Kasrils suggests that MK served a counter-hegemonic function, by “demonstrat[ing] that apartheid rule could be challenged,” rather than engaging in whole scale revolutionary warfare. This joint mobilization also provided new recruits with their first sustained exposure to Marxist theory, acquired as a consequence of learning the proper way to operate a clandestine military organization. Despite this exposure to Marxist theories of revolution, at least in the first few years of operation, MK remained relatively modest in methods and aims.

On December 16th, 1961, during a public holiday commemorating the Voortrekker victory over Dingaan, bombs exploded near government offices and critical infrastructure in all major cities in South Africa. In conjunction with the bombings, leaflets and posters publicly announced the arrival of MK. This

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carefully orchestrated operation would be the first of dozens carried out over the next two years, all designed to minimize the possibility of “civilian” casualties, while maximizing damage to visible government symbols and disrupting economic prosperity. In contrast to the discipline and restraint exhibited by MK, the armed wing of the PAC carried out increasingly violent attacks in the Transkei and Western Cape. Under-prepared and ill-equipped, Poqo primarily clashed with police in a number of direct confrontations, assassinated black informants in Langa township, as well as attacked white farmers in Paarl.21 Although it is a misnomer to call Poqo actions indiscriminate, the PAC did not specifically exclude “civilians” in its attempt to provoke general insurrection through “spontaneous” violence.

Concurrent with the domestic sabotage campaign, the ANC accelerated existing plans to internationalize their organization by establishing relationships with sympathetic governments. Ghana was a likely choice, given Nkrumah’s professed Pan-Africanist commitment to the decolonization of Africa.22 Tennyson Makiwane, the first Director of International Affairs, established an office there as early as 1959, only to be expelled in 1961 when Nkrumah mercurially realigned himself with the PAC.23 Fortunes changed in 1962, when the Pan African Freedom Movement for Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa

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(PAFMESCA) sent Nelson Mandela on a whirlwind tour of recently decolonized African states.\textsuperscript{24} Travelling to Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Ghana, Tanganyika, Ethiopia, amongst other African states, Mandela, later accompanied by Joe Matthews and Oliver Tambo, received assurances of limited funding as well as permission to establish guerilla training camps. In addition, Mandela visited ANC offices in London while meeting with parliamentary opposition leaders. Despite effusive promises, PAFMESCA member nations remained fair weather allies. Akin to its indirect descendent, the Organization for African Unity Liberation Committee, the commitment of member states to pan-African struggles against colonialism waxed and waned as diplomatic pressures mounted and internal disputes divided African nations.\textsuperscript{25}

Following Nelson Mandela’s arrest on August 5, 1962, the tenor of MK operations shifted from sabotage to preparations for probable exile. In October, the ANC held its first annual conference in three years in Lobatse, across the boarder from the Transvaal in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. This unusual meeting consisted of only a handful of ANC leaders, accompanied by a significantly larger contingent of dual SACP/ANC members serving on the influential steering committee.\textsuperscript{26} The Lobatse Conference, as historian Stephen Ellis rightfully points out, marked an important turning point in MK, as well as in


the ever-changing relationship between the ANC and the SACP. At this meeting the ANC formally adopted “armed struggle” as one of its principle means for achieving racial equality and democracy in South Africa. The ambiguity of MK’s autonomous status was erased as the ANC, under SACP influence, formally committed itself to a military solution. Although strong evidence suggests the ANC arrived at decision under the undue influence of dual ANC/SACP members, this relationship can also be considered marriage of convenience that conferred advantages on both parties, however uneven these might be. As Ellis indicates, the ANC’s legacy of mass politics provided the SACP with a popular legitimacy it was otherwise unable to attract underground. Furthermore the ANC, regardless of its earlier reformist ambitions, remained the oldest African political organization and enjoyed an unparalleled familiarity with the intricacies of black political life in South Africa. Likewise, the ANC lacked any experience operating as an illegal organization, thus, greatly benefiting from the expertise of the SACP in such matters. Accepting the armed struggle as the current mode of resistance, the ANC also came to depend on the SACP for its connections to the Soviet Union, a nation which later proved to be its most reliable and generous donor.27

Within a few short months Duma Nokwe, Moses Kotane, and Oliver Tambo traveled to various Eastern Bloc nations, assuring socialist countries of the ANC’s newfound commitment to armed struggle and amicable partnership

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with the SACP.\textsuperscript{28} Such arrangements proved timely, when, on July 11th 1963, South African police, acting on a tip from informant and MK Commander Bruno Mtolo, raided the Lillieslief Farm in Rivonia, capturing much of the MK High Command Kasrils.\textsuperscript{29} In the chaotic months that followed, further arrests ensued as additional MK cadres cooperated with authorities, while the remainder either went into hiding or exile. Eloquently captured by Fish Keitseng, an ANC handler in Lobatse, the first journeys out of South Africa proved to be both peripatetic and fearful.\textsuperscript{30} Keitseng guided dozens of ANC and SACP members on the “Northern Highway,” a route passing through Bechuanaland Protectorate to Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia where contracted flights completed the journey to Dar es Salaam or London.\textsuperscript{31} Further complicating this journey, South African police enjoyed broad network of spies within the Bechuanaland and neighboring territories, often forcing Keitseng to travel on obscure routes and by cover of darkness to evade detection and arrest. Even with all possible precautions, exiles still faced the uncertain prospect of air travel. Pilots occasionally reneged on their contracts by returning their fugitive passengers to South Africa, while problems with payment often delayed contracted flights, and sabotage remained


a distinct possibility, as seen in December 1962 when South African agents bombed a plane used to transport exiles.32

In these early years, most exiles assembled in Dar es Salaam before embarking on their final destinations. From Dar es Salaam, experienced exiles assumed a variety of posts within the international structures, while less experienced cadres might be sent to a variety of locations for guerrilla training or to complete their formal education.33 In the early 1960s, ANC guerrillas trained in camps located in Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt, while the SACP hand selected particularly promising candidates for training in the Soviet Union in facilities near Odessa; later sending recruits for specialization in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria.34 Prior to the Sino-Soviet split, a small group of cadres led by veteran trade unionist, Joe Gqabi, trained in China at a training camp outside Nanking.35 Regardless of rank, at this time most ANC and SACP members regarded exile as a temporary condition. Ronnie Kasrils, himself sent to the Odessa training camp, wrote; “We expected that we would return as a part of a victorious revolutionary army in a couple of years at the most… not for a moment did we anticipate that we were going into exile for decades.”36


experience of traveling to Soviet Union, where would-be “freedom fighters”
aquired the esoteric knowledge of warfare from seasoned WWII veterans, all
conspired to buffet the hopes of MK guerrillas. This spirit of optimism caused
Kasrils to comment, “everyone expected to return home after completing
training”. Indeed, many guerrillas deliberately left family behind, told them
nothing about their secret departure, all because they were confident in forecasts
of a temporary exile followed by quick victory.

Although few memoirs and histories detail life in North African and
Chinese camps, several exiles wrote detailed accounts of their experience in the
Soviet Union. The accounts of black recruits tend to foreground the racial
tolerance of their Soviet hosts. In comparison with many South African whites,
the Soviets appeared racially enlightened. Nevertheless this appearance is
belied by other accounts that record some degree of tension. Off base, African
cadres and Soviet men occasionally fought over women, while so-called ‘loose
forces’--drunken ANC cadres engaged in a variety of infractions--sometimes
found themselves locked in local jails. On base, early training programs proved
wildly inappropriate for the kinds of limited guerrilla engagements MK recruits
would later fight. Endless drilling in formation, training in winter conditions, and

courses in heavy artillery, provided few practical skills needed to fight a guerilla war in the African bush. As indicated earlier, most Soviet instructors were WWII veterans, based their lessons on the Soviet experience of the Great Patriotic War, and remained unaware of the nature of combat MK recruits might face in Southern Africa.\textsuperscript{41} Although military training adapted over time, the first generation of MK recruits--like their Soviet-aligned ZIPRA counterparts--returned to Africa to face an unconventional war with a largely conventional orientation.\textsuperscript{42}

Securing a stable presence in newly independent African states presented another set of difficulties. By the mid-1960s the political climate in host states was far from settled and predictable. Within host states, internal factions jockeyed for position amidst an uncertain post-independence political environment, leaving ANC leaders with the difficult task of aligning themselves with the most promising contenders, without offending their current hosts. No state better illustrates this sensitive situation better than Tanzania. Under the “African socialist” regime of Julius Nyerere, Dar es Salaam became “mecca” for radical politics and exiled liberation movements. The New Africa Hotel served as the “watering hole” for a veritable who’s who of would-be nationalist leaders exiled from remaining colonial states.\textsuperscript{43} An alphabet soup of organizations informally crossed paths in this social world, forming loose affiliations with each


other and well as with observant foreign sponsors. Out of this ferment emerged a fragile alliance between the Soviet-supported, “big five” liberation organizations; FRELIMO, ZAPU, MPLA, SWAPO, and the ANC. Lesser contenders also moved in and out of this Dar es Salaam, securing funding from often unreliable sources like the OAU Liberation Committee and China, all the while, capitalizing on the political missteps and internal disputes of their better funded and more visible rivals.44

Despite the warm reception offered by Julius Nyerere, Tanzanian officials within the TANU ruling party soon became suspicious of the burgeoning community of liberation movements. In 1964, the government forced all liberation movements to vacate their offices in Dar es Salaam, permitting each group only four representatives in the capital. The ANC relocated its offices to Morogoro, the site of one of four MK guerrilla camps in rural Tanzania. In 1967, Arthur Kambona, a close advisor to President Nyerere and Tanzanian representative to the OAU Liberation Committee, fled the country amidst allegations he planned to overthrow the government. As revealed during his trial-in-absentia two years later, Kambona allegedly propositioned the leaders of several guest armies, including Oliver Tambo, then the acting president of the ANC, and Potlako Leballo of the PAC. According to Stephen Ellis, Tambo refused to assist Kambona, but neglected to inform Nyerere of the plot. Such revelations soured relations between the ANC and Nyerere, permitting the PAC

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to manipulate the scandal to their benefit, and ultimately leading to the expulsion of MK from Tanzania in late 1969.45

Although Zambia was similarly known for capricious internal politics, at the direction of Soviet backers, in 1965 the ANC shifted the bulk of its operations to Lusaka. At the same time, Joe Modise and Joe Matthews began plans for a joint MK/ZIPRA offensive into Rhodesia, where it was hoped that ANC guerrillas might fight their way into South Africa. Although different authors assign differing rationales for this operation, most suggest that at the time the ANC faced growing dissention from MK guerrillas over the pace and direction of the armed struggle. By this time many of the earliest trainees had already spent several years in Tanzania and Zambian guerrilla camps, undergoing seemingly endless drills and exercises under an increasingly authoritarian command structure, while the possibility of actual combat seeming ever more remote. In addition to the stalled liberation war, many guerrillas sensed a two-tiered structure emerging between exiles, with military, political, and diplomatic staff living a more comfortable lifestyle, and a Spartan existence endured by the rank-and-file stationed in the camps. This perception often drifted into charges of corruption levied at select figures within ANC leadership, many of whom stood accused of diverting military funds into their own pockets. A few brave voices, such as MK

neophyte, Chris Hani, even called for a National Conference and elections—a request that easily marked one for reprisals by an entrenched leadership.46

In June 1967, Modise and Matthews, with backing from the National Executive Committee, began to infiltrate guerrillas across the Zambian/Rhodesia boarder in preparation for the upcoming offensive. In August, the Luthuli Detachment assembled at two points along the Zambezi River, crossing into Rhodesian territory with the aim to establishing a self-sustained presence in the country they could later parlay into a corridor to South Africa. Although Ken Flower, then director of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Office (CIO), recalled that the MK recruits fought surprisingly well, their conventional offensive permitted a much larger Rhodesian force to eventually inflict heavy casualties. Within a few weeks the Rhodesians, along with an ineffective contingent of South African police, repelled the joint MK/ZIPRA force back into Zambia, while another group escaped to the southwest into Botswana. Chris Hani led the contingent in Botswana, which was later arrested and tried by authorities on weapons charges. Hani and others served two years in prison on these charges, conveniently forgotten by the increasingly self-absorbed leadership in Lusaka.47

By all accounts, the Wankie Operation was a bitter defeat for the ANC, SACP, and their allies. Guerrillas failed to establish a foothold in Rhodesia, suggesting to many that the possibility of bringing the battle to South Africa was,


at that moment, moribund. Given the circumstances of the defeat—a small force applying conventional techniques against a significantly larger army followed by the failure to re-supply units once “in-country”—many speculated that Modise, among others, orchestrated the doomed campaign to rid the ANC of troublesome dissenters. To those holding this view, it was no accident that Chris Hani—among the most vocal critics of the Lusaka leadership—found himself as the head commissar of the unit leading the failed operation. Regardless of the actual inspiration for the Wankie Campaign, its effects on morale within ANC proved devastating.48

Upon his release from prison in 1969, Chris Hani returned to Lusaka and circulated a memorandum in which he lambasting senior leaders for a variety of offenses. Later known as the Hani Memorandum, the document sent shock waves through all quarters of the external mission. Vladimir Shubin, a former Soviet handler for the ANC, suggested that the now-misplaced document laid blame for the failure of the operation on a culture of ‘careerism’ that plagued the exile organization. In essence, Hani’s complaint was that the organization grew complacent in exile, and that leaders forfeited struggle and sacrifice for a lifestyle comfort and personal gain. Hani minced few words by calling out specific leaders by name; directly charging veteran ANC lawyer, Duma Nokwe, with drunkenness, referencing chief representative James Hadebe’s expulsion from Tanzania for “counter-revolutionary activities,” while sharply criticizing Joe

Modise’s competency as MK Commander. Hani also struck at the growing stratification of the exile structures. He indirectly attacked the privileged sons and daughters of high ranking leaders who enjoyed scholarships to Western universities and prestigious posts in the diplomatic wing, while highlighting the condition of less-connected, poorer recruits who bore the brunt the armed struggle in bush camps. Although Hani merely articulated the bitterness felt many Wankie veterans, some ranking leaders equated his frankness with treason. Indeed, if not for the intervention of Mzwai Piliso, Hani might have faced imprisonment, expulsion, or worse.49

Largely in response to the criticisms levied in the Hani Memorandum, in late April 1969, the ANC gathered representatives together in Morogoro for its Third Consultative Conference--the first since its flight into exile. By all accounts, the ANC was in a state of crisis in the late 1960s. The armed struggle ground to a halt in Rhodesia. Erstwhile African hosts proved to be less than reliable when internal and external pressures mounted. Finally, the South African government enjoyed an unparalleled era of peace and prosperity while implementing the basic structures of “high apartheid,” accelerating the forced removal of “black spots,” installing the first Bantustans, all the while continuing to suppress domestic political dissent. Against the security of its sworn enemy, the exile community found itself largely demoralized by the Wankie Campaign and internally divided along many lines. Although it is tempting to portray these

divisions as purely ideological--pitting communists against Africanist factions--this internal dynamic was in fact, far more complex, encompassing the psychological effects of geography, emergent patterns of patronage, and longstanding personal relationships.50

In some respects the Morogoro Conference marked an important turning point for the ANC. Many commentators often portray these changes made at Morogoro as evidence of the growing influence of the SACP. While SACP certainly gained leverage within its partner organization at this time, again, the idea that these administrative maneuverings represented clearly define blocs neatly aligned to specific ideological positions obscures more complex motives. Perhaps the most important change made during Morogoro was the inclusion of so-called “non-Africans” into the External Mission of the ANC. After much debate and consternation, delegates eventually agreed to permit white, Indian, and Coloured membership but added two important limitations; first, non-Africans continued to be barred from the ANC structures within South Africa, and, second, non-Africans remained ineligible for membership in the NEC. Flag Boshielo, a veteran communist, led the case for the inclusion of whites, arguing that at a such a critical moment in the struggle, the ANC needed to open its arms to all, while at the same time committing its very organization to principle of non-racialism as outlined in the first clauses of the Freedom Charter. Moses Kotane, also a veteran communist, argued against the inclusion of whites, fearing an influx of whites into leadership positions might further undermine the legitimacy of

the organization in the eyes of its predominantly black rank-and-file. Although a variety of submerged motives accompanied these stated positions, the adoption of limited non-racialism, in effect, opened the door to communists who were previously barred from a variety of decision-making bodies within the ANC. 51

The decision to include non-Africans had a cascading effect on other decisions made at Morogoro, and at corollary meetings held shortly thereafter. Delegates voted in favor of the creation of the Revolutionary Council, a decision that collected previously scattered posts into a single body solely dedicated to the planning and execution of MK operations. The Revolutionary Council, subordinate to the NEC, fell below the executive level, thus leaving membership open to whites, Indians, and coloureds as well as blacks. As a consequence of their specialized training, as well as their connection to Soviet donors, communists of all colors dominated the new policy-making body. As witnessed by the election of non-Africans like Joe Slovo, Yusef Dadoo, and Reg September, as well longstanding dual members such as the party achieved an unparalleled level of influence over the RC, and, in turn, over the subsequent course of the armed struggle. Exercising this newfound leverage, communists also offered the ‘Strategy and Tactics’ policy document for consideration at Morogoro. Ultimately approved by the Consultative Committee, The Strategy and Tactics document discounted the urban African working class as the most likely source of revolution in South Africa. The authors of the document followed


Despite this internal reorganization and external planning, the ANC still lacked the forward bases it needed to stage attacks into South Africa. Making matters worse, immediately following the Morogoro conference, the Zambian and Tanzanian governments almost simultaneously expelled MK units from their respective territories. Just prior to the Morogoro Conference, Zambia joined other Eastern and Central African states in signing the Lusaka Manifesto, which demanded that liberation organizations desist from the armed struggle in their territories in exchange for a rather hollow recognition of human equality by the remaining colonial powers in Southern Africa. Then, in July 1969, Julius Nyerere ordered MK personnel out of the Kongwa camp in southeastern Tanzania, in response to evidence presented at the trial-in-absentia of Arthur Kambona, indicating Oliver Tambo knew of the coup attempt, but neglected to inform authorities. The expulsion of troops from Kongwa, combined with Zambian reticence about conducting the armed struggle from its soil, eventually forced the
ANC to temporarily relocate all MK personnel to Moscow. The uneasy environment in host states also prompted the ANC and SACP to approach even more remote nations, like Sudan, in the event of a permanent and total expulsion. Irrespective of the aims expressed at Morogoro, the chronically shifting political scene within host states compelled ANC and SACP to devote precious attention to merely remaining on the continent of Africa, rather than fomenting revolution at home.53

In the early 1970s, malaise once again descended upon the ANC and SACP. At this time, a buffer of unsympathetic states and colonies ringed South Africa, isolating its boarders from any sustained incursion by MK guerrillas. Without a reliable path into South Africa planning for revolution remained so much armchair theorizing. Although the Revolutionary Council endlessly debated the proper technical conditions for fomenting revolution, the failure to establish bases in forward areas, as well as internal structures within South Africa, effectively mooted any prospective conclusion. Nevertheless, the RC made some attempts to remedy this situation, as evidenced in 1971 when Slovo authorized Operation J, a scheme to land guerrillas and weapons on the Transkei coast using a ship moored off the East African coast. However, on the inaugural journey, the engines of the Aventura seized off of the Tanzanian coast, stalling hopes of any future sea landings. The SACP also attempted to rekindle awareness of the exiled liberation movement within South Africa by staging a number of propaganda spectacles in select cities. Young SACP cadres such as

Jeremy Cronin, Raymond Suttner, and David and Sue Rabkin planted leaflet bombs outside railway stations and bus terminals, often leaving car radios blasting recorded messages from exile leaders. Spectacular as these operations might have seemed to perpetrators and witnesses alike, they did not attract the kind of popular support the ANC needed to bring the struggle to the home front. Instead, ten years into exile, the core of the ANC/SACP alliance remained a relatively small, increasingly aged group, beleaguered by their precarious foothold in Africa, preoccupied with internecine disputes, and increasingly stratified by the peculiar flows patronage of arriving from international donors.\textsuperscript{54}

In April 1974, disaffected army officers overthrew Portuguese dictator Marcello Caetano. Although the liberation struggle in Angola and Mozambique preceded the coup by nearly ten years, few observers of Southern Africa predicted the coup or foresaw its impact on the geopolitics of the region. By 1975, both Angola and Mozambique moved toward independence, with the socialist aligned MPLA and FRELIMO both expected to win pre-independence elections. Within South Africa, the decolonization of Portuguese Africa greatly encouraged a new generation of politically minded youths, already articulating their own visions of liberation within the language of the Black Consciousness Movement. The Vorster government, underestimating the strength and commitment of student activists, implemented the Bantu Education Act, another in a series of apartheid laws designed to reduced educational opportunities available to blacks this time by restricting the language of instruction to Afrikaans.

A new wave of mass protest swept South Africa, largely independent of the direction of the ANC. In the aftermath of the Soweto shootings, the ANC once again found itself behind the people it purported to lead—struggling to stay ahead of popular calls for political change, all the while maintaining the image of continued relevancy for both domestic and international audiences.55

The massive exodus of South African youths and the collapse of buffer states raised the stakes of the liberation struggle, forcing exiles to capitalize on these changes or be swept aside by other contenders. Over the next several years the ANC attempted to simultaneously absorb waves of new exiles, build a series of forward bases and safe houses in Angola, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Lesotho, while implanting their model of revolution into the emergent culture of mass protest gripping urban South Africa. Given the complexity of any one of these tasks, taken together these challenges greatly exacerbated pre-existing tendencies within the exile community, while introducing a set of previously unknown problems.

Just a few months before the Soweto uprising, the ANC leadership, under pressure from the SACP, expelled the ‘Gang of Eight,’ a group of veteran ANC members. Several of those expelled claimed ANC membership cards that dated earlier than the Defiance Campaign, while many also enjoyed personal friendships and even familial ties to the ‘old guard’ ANC leadership. One member of the so-called ‘Gang of Eight,’ Tennyson Makiwane, had been director of International Affairs during the crisis years of the late 1950s and early 1960s, a

personal friend of Oliver Tambo, and cousin to Intelligence Chief, Mzwai Piliso. Although the reasons for their expulsion are complex and vary between different accounts, Tennyson and other dissidents enjoyed high ranking positions within the ANC prior to the Morogoro conference, but languished thereafter, often assigning blame for their political downfall on the ascendancy of white, Indian, and coloured communists within the organization. Prior to Morogoro, another of the eight, Themba Mqota even organized a faction that unsuccessfully challenged the re-election of Oliver Tambo to the NEC. After Morogoro, unbeknownst to SACP leaders, Tambo held a secret 'meeting in the bush' with the faction where he offered each patronage positions as advisors to the President. Despite attempts to reconcile with these dissenters, by 1975, the situation became intolerable, after the eight dissidents used the occasion of a funeral for longtime Africanist, Robert Resha, to rail against the growing influence of the SACP within the ANC. This last provocation proved to be their last, forcing NEC to expel the group later that year. As SACP members used their publications to tar the group as ‘counter-revolutionary' and ‘reactionary,' while the ‘Gang of Eight’ responded in kind, creating a short lived splinter group known as the Africanist National Congress, which issued a number of embarrassing diatribes against the ANC and SACP from its London office.56

Like the exodus of old-guard self-proclaimed “Africanists,” the influx of the Soweto generation further tested the already complex relationship between the ANC and SACP. Troubled by divisions within its existing membership, factions within ANC and SACP competed with each other to imprint their politics on new recruits arriving from South Africa. Many leaders assumed the Soweto generation to be wholly naive, devoid of any careful analysis of South African society, politics, and economics, therefore arriving tabula rasa to be molded by various interests. This is not to suggest that incoming recruits did, in fact, arrive without political sensibilities. Indeed, this assumption later fostered one of the most significant divides between the older exile leadership and incoming youths. Nevertheless, rival factions perceived recruits in this way, and based on this perception approached the influx as a means to remake the entire exile community in their respective image.57

While the communist-heavy Revolutionary Council controlled the overall planning and strategy of MK, under MK Commander Joe Modise, ANC stalwarts retained responsibility for the day-to-day operation of existing guerrilla camps in Zambia, and those tentatively reopened in Tanzania. This precarious balance, if it can be called a balance at all, proved short lived. In 1976, Soviet advisors directed the ANC and SACP to construct a series of new camps in northwestern and southern Angola as part of a broader effort to shield the MPLA government against a counter-insurgency campaign waged by UNITA. This expansion into

Angola primarily advanced the hand of the SACP, because it provided the party with new means by which to extend its informal influence. First, Angolan camps were dedicated to a specifically Marxist training program, due in large part to the reinvigorated interest and largess of the Soviet Union, as well the expertise of the Cuban personnel that assisted with camp administration. In May 1977, the Novo Catengue camp opened, followed soon after by the aptly-named Funda camp. Among the largest of the Angolan camps, Novo Catengue became known as the “University of the South,” complete with a heavily Marxist curriculum authored by senior party member, Jack Simons. Although any estimates of MK troop strengths or camp output wildly vary, in all likelihood graduates of Novo Catengue numbered in the low thousands, comprising a significant portion of the overall guerrilla army after the late 1970s. Second, the SACP staffed each newly created army unit with political commissars, in an attempt to ensure continued adherence to official policies and perspectives. The overwhelming majority of commissars came from the ranks of the SACP, creating an effect of surveillance and control disproportionate to the actual size of the party.

In October 1978, in the midst of a comprehensive strategic review, a senior delegation including Oliver Tambo, Moses Mabhida, Joe Slovo, Mzwai Piliso, and Joe Modise, visited Vietnam. General Vo Nguyen Giap met with the delegation and discussed the prospects for revolution in South Africa. In a

58 isiXhosa for ‘learn’ or ‘read’.

meeting that greatly influenced MK strategy and tactics in the next few years, Giap emphasized the primacy of the political over the military, encapsulated in his concept of armed propaganda, which, in the Vietnamese context, consisted of highly visible military attacks orchestrated primarily for political objectives. Such attacks often resulted in operational failures, nevertheless but offered the psychological effect of victory. Giap also stressed the importance of legal, united front organizations such as school associations and trade unions, which could consistently politicize the masses, preparing the way for the popular revolution. Although Giap’s advice encompassed some strategies long employed by the MK, he provided the delegation with a coherent narrative of how each element worked together to foment revolution, all backed by compelling evidence of their overall success. As Howard Barrell noted in his epic analysis of MK strategy and tactics, the impact of Giap’s guidance resulted in a “Damascene conversion” among delegates. Upon return to Lusaka, delegates penned the “Green Book,” a document that attempted to combine the political and military struggle, while serving as the theoretical underpinning for the next series of MK campaigns.60

Loosely following the principles outlined in the “Green Book,” MK conducted a series of high-profile attacks within South Africa over the next several years. In January 1980, three MK guerrillas entered the Volkskas Bank in Silverton, taking several hostages before police retook the bank killing all three, as well as one hostage in the melee that ensued. Six months later, MK guerrillas detonated oil tanks at the massive refinery at Sasolburg, creating a

spectacular explosion visible for miles around, while destroying precious reserves during an ongoing Arab oil embargo of South Africa. One year later, MK guerrillas launched rocket attack on the Voortrekkerhoogte military base outside Pretoria. The attack achieved little in military terms, but presented the ability of MK to operate within South Africa, and to the strike at a time and place of its choosing. Finally, on December 20th 1982, just days after the 31st anniversary of the inaugural MK operation, guerrillas detonated limpet mines within the Koeburg Nuclear Plant situated outside Cape Town. These attacks occurred in conjunction with coordinated media campaigns announcing a succession of popular slogans best exemplified by named “Years;” with 1979 as the “Year of the Spear,” 1980 as the “Year of the Charter” and 1981 as “Year of the Youth.” The intended combined effect of such efforts was to reintroduce the ANC as a player within the internal political scene, and to graft ANC politics over the existing ferment by inserting guerrilla attacks into renewed mass protest.61

South African authorities did not passively await the return of the ANC. Indeed, Pretoria used a variety of means to disrupt and destroy the external mission. Among the most successful of these means were infiltrators that entered camps disguised as refugees. According to stories circulated within the ranks, on September 20th 1977, an unidentified saboteur, or group of saboteurs, allegedly poisoned the evening meal in the MK mess. Luckily for the hundreds of cadres poisoned, so these stories went, Cuban personnel dined at another facility and did not rotate kitchen staff, unlike the separate kitchen that was

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administered by MK administration and fed MK cadres. Cuban doctors quickly identified the toxin and administered an antidote, averting a potential tragedy. Aside from this alleged incident, the work of infiltrators was not limited to poisonings. Some infiltrators achieved leadership positions and applied overly strict punishments and training regimens as a way to foment dissent and disrupt operations. Others deliberately destroyed equipment, wasted ammunition, or committed petty theft in order to seed conflict within the ranks. While others quietly awaited their return to South Africa, where they might reveal their comrades, or flee altogether and later pass valuable information to police and military officials. Clearly, not all acts of malingering or disobedience can be linked to such infiltrators, nevertheless, the extensive knowledge of the exile community enjoyed by South African authorities definitely suggests that infiltration was both penetrating and routine. Conversely, MK also knew in advance of several SAAF bombing raids and cross-boarder raids, revealing a common feature of liberation wars in Africa—that ostensible adversaries often possessed an intimate, reciprocal knowledge of each other fostered by the presence of double and even triple agents.62

This mutual familiarity does not mean that MK was content with the presence of such spies. In 1979, the NEC created the core structure of National Intelligence, also known as ‘Nat’ or Mbokodo. Headed by veteran exile, Mzwai

Piliso, Mbokodo became a much feared, ruthless presence in the Angolan camps where accusations of spying and sabotage ran rife. After the assassination of several prominent leaders, followed by the chance discovery of a spy ring in Lusaka, the NEC afforded Mbokodo an extraordinary degree of autonomy throughout the entire organization, and sent promising recruits to East Germany for training in interrogation and intelligence. Mbokodo also assumed control of Pango, Viana, Quibaxe, and Quadro, a set of prison camps in northwestern Angola, constructed in 1977 and 1978 and operated largely in isolation from the rest of MK. Although these “secret” camps housed inmates since their creation, the numbers of prisoners soon multiplied as Mbokodo over-extended its authority from suspected spies to disaffected guerrillas. Regardless of the veracity of their crime, those imprisoned in the camps faced poor rations, torture, an excessive work regimen, and, occasionally, arbitrary execution. By the time South Africa began its “destabilization” campaign in the early 1980s, an already paranoid atmosphere reached hysteric proportions, with few excluded from the terror.

Amidst this environment of vituperative accusation and widespread dissent, the MPLA called upon MK to help defend Malanje province from a series of attacks by UNITA. In August 1983, units commanded by Chris Hani, Lennox Zuma, and Timothy Mokoena began operations against Savimbi’s rebels. At first, MK units fought well, repelling UNITA from their positions in spite of the

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63 Mbokodo is isiXhosa for ‘grinding stone’.

dissertation of several APLA units. Bolstered by their initial victories, MK units then crossed the Rio Cuanza into UNITA territory, where they encountered fierce resistance, sustained heavy casualties, and retreated to their bases in the towns of Caculama and Kangandala. In early 1984, the situation deteriorated further, cutting off several units from lines of support, resulting in widespread dissatisfaction. When an NEC delegation headed by Oliver Tambo toured Caculama to quell grievances, an ultimatum arrived from troops at Kangandala demanding an immediate halt to actions in Malanje province and requesting a redeployment against South African troops. The troops threatened a mutiny if Tambo refused to meet their demands. In response, Tambo left for Luanda without addressing the troops at Kangandala, or submitting to their requests.65

The mutiny that ensued, later known as the Mkatashinga, eventually inspired nearly ninety percent of the MK personnel in Angola to take up arms against their superiors.66 Soldiers left the front in commandeered vehicles, attempted to present their demands to the leadership in Luanda, but were intercepted by Mbokodo personnel en route and diverted to the transit camp at Viana, just a few kilometers from the Angolan capital. There, mutineers sent emissaries to other camps as well as to compounds housing Radio Freedom personnel in Luanda, explaining their demands and encouraging further support. Eventually Chris Hani visited the camp, suggested that mutineers elect a


66 Mkatashinga is Kimbundu for ‘burden’.
committee to negotiate with the leadership. Mutineers selected a 'Committee of Ten,' which presented a litany of even more drastic demands, including the suspension of Mbokodo, a review of strategic policies, and the election of new leaders. After an attempted invasion of Viana by the Angolan Presidential Guard, Hani returned to address mutineers, convincing them to disarm without further violence. The Committee of Ten was taken into custody, some imprisoned in Nova Installacao, a notorious Luanda prison, while others were sent to prison camps at Pango and Quibaxe, where, two months later, another mutiny occurred, this time followed by several casualties and seven executions.67

Although largely unknown outside the exile community, the entire Mkatashinga episode plunged the ANC, the SACP, and MK into another period of introspection and reorganization akin to that experienced in the wake of the Wankie Campaign. Unlike the Wankie Campaign, the Mkatashinga was quickly followed by the Vaal Triangle uprising, a period of unrest that rivaled all that preceded it. The impact of the regional insurrection in first in Alexandra, then in other townships in the PWV, and finally in townships nationwide combined with the changes instituted at the fourth Consultative Conference at Kabwe in early 1985, reoriented the struggle to a decidedly different game—namely, armed provocation aimed at gaining leverage in a negotiated settlement. Although MK actions continued unabated until the suspension of the armed struggle in 1993,

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behind the scenes both sides intimated that negotiation was both possible and preferable.
On Wednesday, December 26th 1962, twenty seven men traveled by truck to the town of Mamre. They arrived at a property they thought belonged to an associate, but actually belonged to the Lutheran Missionary Society. After unloading a motorcar engine, a chart of the human body, and camping equipment they set up tents only to be instructed to move to a more concealed location surrounded on three sides by a dense thicket.\(^\text{68}\) The purpose of the camp continues to be highly contested, but as camp commandant Denis Goldberg put it in an interview in 1990, “it was hardly a Boy Scouts camp.”\(^\text{69}\) Both organizers were members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, but others had yet to be inducted.\(^\text{70}\) After three days of lectures, exercise, and conversation, the caretaker of the property discovered the camp and called the local supervisor for Coloured Affairs, who then summoned the police from Cape Town. After meeting with Albie Sachs and Denis Goldberg the police instructed the camp attendees to report to the Calendon Square police station for further questioning. The attendees stayed at the camp overnight, then drove back to the Cape Flats, where they disembarked in formation, marching and singing as they headed home.\(^\text{71}\)

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\(^\text{69}\) Denis Goldberg, interview with Howard Barrell, 2/7/90

\(^\text{70}\) Denis Goldberg, interview with author, 5/20/08.

\(^\text{71}\) Denis Goldberg, interview with author, 5-20-08.
This description is an assemblage of uncontested details of what was, or was not, the first guerrilla training camp inside South Africa. Everything else that anyone ever said or wrote about the camp was contested or contradicted, sometimes by the same person. Competing claims over whether this was first guerrilla training camp operated by MK are less important than understanding how recollections of this camp illuminate a series of broader historiographical questions related to the armed struggle in South Africa. What we know and cannot know about this camp is determined by the evidentiary paradigms that order knowledge about past. Descriptions of the Mamre camp surface and submerge in three bodies of evidence, court testimony given during the Rivonia Trial, written reportage in the form of published diaries, and oral testimony of camp attendees.72 The purpose of this chapter is not to weave together these bodies of oral and written evidence into a convincing and authoritative account of what happened in to camp. Rather I will consider the way these sources have been invoked in negotiations over the purpose, meaning, and legacy of the camp.

The fundamental question of this chapter is to what extent can we see through various layers of oral and written evidence? The assumption here, following Luise White’s arguments on secrecy, lies and history, is that “texts,

whether written or oral, are not transparent.”73 Anyone reporting on the past is simultaneously engaged in the process of interpretation, and interpretation means the selection and omission of details that trouble a certain narrative account. As White puts it, “these authors, or speakers, mediated the past as much as [historians] will do,” and consequently, “we can’t see through them to the past.”74 The idea of texts constituting a history composed of layer upon layer of interpretation applies to any number of topics, but is a particularly useful way of excavating the historical reckonings of the armed struggle. The Mamre camp is useful not just for its notoriety as a possible point of origin of guerrilla warfare in South Africa, but also because it is called to serve so many rhetorical purposes in these three bodies of evidence. What makes this ‘secret’ camp so interesting is not that it remained unspoken, but that so many people could not resist talking about it, and talked about it in so many ways. At different times, in different venues, and for different audiences, the Mamre camp stood as a signifier for any number of things; local interpretations of the practice of guerrilla war, a token of resistance in a battle of wills between interrogator and interrogated, a site of production of historical knowledge and meaning. In each of these deployments, the narrative conventions and selective arguments of writers and speakers opened and shuttered windows on the past. Contrary to more positivist assumption that posit that a clearer picture of the past accrues with time and the accumulation of more evidence, this unruly material demonstrates that the details


of the Mamre camp become more incomplete, and less self evident, with each successive layer of interpretation.

The chronology of events preceding the Mamre camp cannot be understood without describing how locally specific forms of segregation impacted political developments in Cape Town. For a variety of reasons better described elsewhere, there was no clear correlation of labor and ethnicity in Cape Town.75 This mixture of a Coloured and African working class, did not prevent successive governments from segregating public accommodations or subjecting new arrivals from residential segregation. Later apartheid brought more strident attempts to divide this mixed working class and reorder it into a hierarchy based on racial classifications. The Group Areas Act 1950 and the designation of the Cape as a coloured labor preference area hardened the boundaries that circumscribed employment and residence for Africans in the Cape. In an ideal form, the entire African population would be reduced in the Cape, leaving only a pliable, male workforce of migrants living in hostels.

Although the ideal outcomes of these laws did not match the realities of enforcement, the effect of this codification of preexisting forms of segregation had a three fold effect on political developments during the latter half of the 1950s. First it weakened claims on residency, splitting working class families and placing entire communities in jeopardy of being endorsed out of the city. Secondly, these laws attempted to drive a wedge between Coloured and African workers. The twin pressures of residential segregation and the social

engineering of labor, following others, radicalized working class politics in the Western Cape to a degree perhaps unseen in other areas.  

This radicalization did not result a mass following for the Congress Alliance. Rather, as government interventions drove further into the body politic, one could best describe situation as constituencies in search of a political home in the Cape. And while the Congress Alliance did not automatically benefit from the radicalization wrought from these interventions, it certainly attempted to channel discontent into support for its particular brand of non-racial politics. Attendees at the Mamre camp recalled three organizations, the Modern Youth Society, the Volunteers, and the Nyanga Cultural and Social Organization as important entry points into Congress politics. Brief mention of these organizations is warranted not because they were the antecedents of MK or inspiration for the Mamre camp. But they did provide a vocabulary of political expression and a repertoire of tactics that reappeared in a different form and under different circumstances at Mamre.

The first of these organizations was the Modern Youth Society. Established by leftist students in 1952, and fading out sometime after the Treason Trial, this non-racial organization was the off-campus mirror of an exclusively on-campus organization. The society organized social gatherings, night classes for African dockworkers, and served as a forum for debate for all manner of leftist politics.

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In its manifold tasks the Modern Youth Society served as an important clearinghouse for disseminating leftist ideas in the form of political education for workers, but more importantly as a sort of brain trust of up and coming thinkers and leaders whose influence extended throughout Cape Town and beyond. At a time when Cape Town became more rigidly segregated, and the Congress Alliance itself was organized along racial lines, and, the Modern Youth Society opened a non-racial space where members could put their ideals into practice. Most often this meant social events like two youth camps over the Easter holiday, but also meant conventional activism like assisting Toivo ja Toivo to tape record a statement to the United Nations.  

Concurrent with the Modern Youth Society was the Volunteers a paramilitary formed during the Defiance Campaign. The Volunteers had a nationwide presence with regional chapters in each province. The Volunteers were not a paramilitary in the sense that they were a fighting force or an army-in-waiting, but that they adopted many of the embodied affectations of a uniformed force. Members wore khaki coveralls, armbands, and green berets, marched lock in step, and performed a variety of ceremonial functions during public events such as funerals. Although some have drawn a straight line between the public symbolism of the Volunteers and the clandestine operations of Umkhonto we Sizwe, this organization is less an antecedent than the deployment of a repertoire of ideas about militancy. Foremost among these ideas is the notion

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79 The Volunteers are alternately known as ‘amavoluntiya.’
that military discipline, particularly discipline of the body, is a necessary part of male political practice. In the context of the Defiance Campaign, this practice was non-violent protest, after the turn to armed struggle many of these same ideas were taken up for an entirely different purpose, armed struggle. 

The expansion of the ANC Youth League in another example of the branching out of formations in Cape Town. This expansion occurred during the late 1950s and accelerated in the years prior to the Mamre camp. Sports were the vehicle for recruiting young men and women into the Youth League. Teddington Nqaphayi, a Youth League leader and Mamre camp attendee, recalled that most of the expansion of the ANC Youth League in Cape Town occurred through the auspices of the Nyanga Cultural and Social Organization which sponsored a rugby club, two soccer clubs, one for young men and another for young women. While playing matches, leaders of the organization introduced discussions of Congress politics among members, gradually swelling the ranks of the formal ANC Youth League. By 1962, this chapter had 168 members who then became a recruitment pool for MK and for the Mamre camp. Although the Nyanga Cultural and Social Organization is significant an entry point to the Mamre camp, it is also part of a wider phenomenon of sports teams overlapping with political organizing in Cape Town and beyond.

80 Sandile Sejake and Alfred Willie, interview with author, 5/28/08. Peter Mfene (Teddington Nqaphayi), interview with Wolfie Kodesh 2/19/92.

81 Peter Mfene (Teddington Nqaphayi), interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 2-19-92.
The decision to embark on armed struggle is a complicated and contested history better described elsewhere. Most debates over this contentious strategic turn revolve around how different personalities within the leadership viewed armed struggle. Camp attendees identify one particular event, the violent repression of the 1960 stay away strike, as the catalyst that crystallized popular attitudes toward armed struggle in Cape Town. The violent repression of the strike accelerated ongoing debates about the place of violence in the struggle. The government, nervous about mass protests after Sharpeville, deployed the army and police, sealed off access to Langa and Nyanga, cut off water and food to the townships, and eventually forced people out of their homes at gunpoint. Although the turn to armed struggle was not a fait accompli, as is commonly suggested in official histories, this militarization sent a strong signal to local activists that the era of non-violent protest had drawn to a close. After the strike ANC members formed underground cell structures, by 1961 Umkhonto had formed a regional command in Cape Town and embarked on a local sabotage campaign, which included fairly unspectacular operations such as cutting

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electrical and telephone lines and small acts of arson. Men began to leave for military training abroad the following year while the regional command sought to expand the sabotage campaign in the hope that government forces might be stretched enough to permit them to return home to fight. Once driven underground, political organizing took on a darker tone and a more embattled hue. When rendered as such it became difficult to distinguish between activities. Painting slogans became carefully orchestrated “operations,” political education arrived at more aggressive conclusions, and confrontations with the state became more urgent. It is in this context then that the Mamre camp represented the militarization of what had been a confrontation between police and protestors, voiced in a vocabulary of politics borrowed from earlier organizations like the Modern Youth Society, the Volunteers, and the Nyanga Social and Cultural Organization.83

In the months after the camp broke up, a few reported to Calendon Square for questioning, others were spirited out of the country, while the remainder faded into obscurity. Denis Goldberg, the camp commandant, went underground in Johannesburg to escape detention under the newly passed 90 Day Law, while Looksmart Ngudle, his lieutenant at the camp, remained in Cape Town, and died in detention after severe torture.84

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Command Performances

The High Command of MK was arrested at the Rivonia farm on July 11th 1963, and the subsequent trial, known afterward as the Rivonia Trial, began four months later. The State charged that the eight defendants under the Sabotage Act, arguing that they not only they orchestrated a campaign of sabotage but that they also embarked on guerrilla war. The Mamre camp directly implicated only Denis Goldberg, but the events there formed a special place in the prosecution’s burden of proof, since they claimed it was a guerrilla training camp, and thus evidence of a guerrilla war. To support their claim, the prosecution called two attendees to testify as state witnesses; Cyril Davids and Caswell Nboxele. The defense cross examined these witnesses but called only Goldberg to testify on his own behalf.85

There are a number of reasons not to view this testimony as transparent evidence of the events at Mamre. In reviewing this evidence I borrow from Michael Johnson’s review of the inquiry into the Denmark Vesey conspiracy, and Philippe Riot’s analysis of the parricide trial of Pierre Riviere. In the case of Vesey, the honor of the court rested on the discovery of a conspiracy but confessions made under torture may have produced a more perfect conspiracy than actually existed. Riot describes how both prosecutors and defense attorneys used evidentiary matrices to extract meaning from an ambiguous autobiography penned by the accused. Both Johnson and Riot not simply skeptical about the usefulness of court testimony as evidence for historians, they

demonstrate how courts hew testimony into coherent narratives of uniform length and consistency. In this regard, they question the way juridical truth, arbitrated through layers of exclusion and representation, is translated into historical fact years after the trial.  

These doubts apply to much of the testimony given during the Rivonia trial. Percy Yutar, the state prosecutor, argued in his opening address that the Rivonia trialists were engaged in a vast and well-orchestrated conspiracy. By intertwining the tropes of the swart gevaar and rooi gevaar, Yutar connected internal acts of sabotage to an externally directed guerrilla war, which he claimed would end with the toppling of the government through armed invasion of the Republic. Police and prosecutors knew enough from their informants that MK was not as coordinated as they insisted, but, like the Charleston inquisitors who interviewed Vesey’s suspected co-conspirators, they had the honor of the court to protect and the heroic myth of the police to uphold. The police did their part to tart up the statements of willing witnesses, and tortured unwilling detainees into tailor made confessions. While the prosecution filtered all questioning about

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87 Police and military officials used the terms *swart gevaar* (black menace) and *rooi gevaar* (red menace) to describe internal and external threats to the apartheid state. The *swart gevaar* referred to the influx of Africans into cities, particularly during the rapid industrialization witnessed in South Africa during WWII. Apartheid planners saw this influx as a mortal danger and responded with a series of residential segregation laws. The *rooi gevaar* referred to internationally sponsored communist subversion. As mass protest in South Africa reached crescendo in the mid-1950s, police and military officials cast opposition groups as puppets of a conspiracy directed from Moscow.

88 More extreme forms of “coaching” occurred. Victor Berrange interviewed Isaac Tlale, during an inquest into the death of Looksmart Ngudle. Tlale testified he was electrocuted repeatedly and then presented with a blank piece of paper which he then signed. His “confession” was later
the Mamre camp through this matrix, emphasizing aspects that strengthened their claims that this was not just a guerrilla camp, but a guerrilla camp tentacled to Moscow. As in the Vesey inquest, the honor of the court was at stake. Producing evidence of a guerrilla camp at Mamre would prevent the high theatrics of the Rivonia Trial from ending in embarrassing denouement of the Treason Trial.

In this respect the defense strategy bears mention. Two concerns guided the treatment of testimony by the defense. On the one hand the defense team wanted to avoid death sentences for their clients, and on the other hand, their clients wanted to use the court as a platform for explaining their political program. Further, the defendants refused to give testimony on aspects of their activities that might implicate other comrades. When questioned about their activities, the defendants either refused to answer or shifted the discussion onto political terrain. The matrix born of these concerns crafted an image of principled, disciplined and sober political activists who had legitimate grievances against an unjust government. Defense witnesses were hardly silent on the Mamre camp; they claimed it was a camp for ‘health and spiritual purposes’ in line with earlier holiday camps held by the Modern Youth Society. But there were limits to what they would say about specific activities involving specific individuals, and these limits, prevented them from elaborating on certain issues.

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and, to some extent, hamstrung the defense. These limits also placed the onus of cross-examination on state witnesses. 90

Johnson’s arguments about coerced testimony and imagined conspiracies, and Riot’s suggestions about interpretive frames of questioning, are better suited for retrying the case in the court of historical opinion than for reading oral and written evidence against the grain. The real value of this testimony lies not in what it tells us about guilt or innocence but in what it reveals about local ideas about guerrilla war.

However much police coerced certain answers during interrogation, state witnesses often went off-script in court. They forgot or adlibbed their lines, they talked about things that were irrelevant to the state’s case, or they gave deliberately vague answers to very specific questions. What is significant about these unconvincing performances, contra Johnson, was not the ability of the state to coach testimony, but the inability of the state to keep its witnesses on message. These improvisations, digressions and equivocations in testimony not only frustrated the prosecution’s line of questioning, they produced a text that was, to paraphrase Carlo Ginzburg, both “dialogic and leaky”. 91 How could anyone determine whether or not Mamre was a guerrilla camp if none of the parties involved knew precisely what a guerrilla training camp was? No one speaking—Yutar, Krog, Goldberg, Davids, or Nboxele—had ever been to a


guerrilla training camp before, nor did any of them have any military training. Neither the prosecution nor the defense called any military experts to offer their opinions. In order for the prosecutors to prove that the Mamre camp was part of an international conspiracy to foment guerrilla war in South Africa, they first had to determine what constituted a guerrilla training camp. This meant entering into a dialogue with witnesses over the meaning of words and “using a shared vocabulary that neither interrogator nor interrogated were entirely comfortable with.”92 The details that leaked out of the margins of this dialogue not only offer telling clues about how camp attendees imagined themselves, but also how the term “guerrilla training camp” was mapped through this shared vocabulary.

The purpose of the camp was an open question and this indeterminacy gave Davids and Nboxele a space to chart out their interpretation of the events at Mamre. Although Davids and Nboxele claimed this was a guerrilla training camp, they could not remember the organizers explicitly saying as much. At best, Davids claimed that Goldberg explained the curriculum at the outset and said “that it was necessary to know about these things in case of revolution.” While Nboxele heard Ngudle say that the purpose was “to help ourselves when we had to fight... the white people” a Xhosa translation of Goldberg’s statement.93 Joel Joffe, a lawyer for the defense, noted that it was unlikely that Goldberg and Ngudle were so careless as to explicitly announce that this was guerrilla training camp to a group of strangers, and even less likely that they continued to do so

throughout the course of their lectures. To make the prosecution’s charges stick, and to save their own necks, Davids and Nboxele had take what they knew, what they were given by police, and what organizers inferred and arrange it into a convincing image of a guerrilla training camp. What was rendered in testimony, then, was a composite of bits and pieces of rehearsed lines, remembered observations, and the personal imaginings of what guerrilla war meant for an electrician and a bakery assistant in Cape Town in the early 1960s.

Thinking on their feet, they told a tale of innocent waifs swept up into a lurid conspiracy. Davids and Nboxele portrayed themselves as uninitiated in politics, claimed only casual relations with the organizers, and were shocked to discover that they were not at a holiday camp. To support their narratives they summoned the following details. Attendees were ordered to move the camp to a more concealed location, a mysterious group of whites funded and organized the camp, attendees were placed in a military hierarchy with enforced discipline, guards were placed around the perimeter of the camp, and lectures included not only mundane topics but also selective readings of revolutionary texts.94

But these details failed to hold together under cross-examination. Victor Berrange, cross-examining for the defense asked Davids for his definition of the term “guerrilla” to which he replied “Young soldiers fighting the Govt – the S.A. Gov. with rifles, hand grenades.” Neither Davids nor Nboxele mentioned the presence of guns or grenades at the camp nor did police collect any weapons at the camp. Here Davids offers a definition that fails to fit his narrative, and one

that, arguably, is off script from any coached testimony. A particularly revealing exchange between Berrange and Davids probes the provenance of this term;

Davids: ...In September I changed—Lt. Sauerman came to see me. Questioned me again—he asked me purpose G’s [Goldberg’s] gorillas [sic] were being trained.

Berrange: Did he tell [what] you knew?

Davids: Yes—Oh no it was a slip—it was a slip—the question was not clear. He did not tell me anything else. Exactly the same questions as before—nothing more. He did not suggest that he had evidence which implicated me.

Berrange: He did not tell you anything more than before. Never suggested gorillas [sic]?

Davids: I am telling the truth now.

Berrange: What made you change your mind?

Davids: I felt depressed—had enough of 90 days. Longing to be back at work. I was concerned. I made enquiries from the S/B [Security Branch]—they were alright.95

Berrange wanted to discredit Davids by revealing that the Security Branch coerced him into inserting the term “gorilla” in his narrative. Joffe also portrays Davids testimony as a textbook example of coaching by the police. But the question of provenance remains open, did the police hand Davids their definition of guerrilla warfare—one that did not fit with the rest of his narrative— or did Davids reverse engineer what he thought the police wanted to hear? Sergeant Card, a detective from Port Elizabeth gave an apt description of his department’s methods; “we just tell him what we know and wait until he confirms it.”96 But


Davids himself described the process in the following way, 'I had been thinking about it before—I had nothing else to think about.' It is just as likely he came up with the definition on his own, cobbling together what he could glean from police questions with his own imaginings of such a war. Distinguishing coaching from imagination might be impossible, but there is enough evidence to suggest that this question be left open to interpretation.

This question demonstrates limitations of court testimony as historical evidence of the Mamre camp and perhaps of most underground activities during the armed struggle. Davids was hardly a willing witness. He maintained that the Mamre camp was for ‘health and spiritual’ purposes for seventy four days under solitary confinement as authorized by the 90 Day Detention Law. Davids only changed his statement after a fifth interrogation when police threatened another term of ninety days. On a deeper level, Davids’ ambiguous, inconsistent, and partial testimony troubles facile depictions of state’s witnesses as turned comrades. Many defendants felt nothing but bitter betrayal by turned comrades, particularly those who turned into askaris, never appeared in court, and invisibly hunted their erstwhile friends. But quite a few acknowledge that everyone has a limited ability to withstand torture, making state witnesses also objects of pity or even sympathy. This indeterminate loyalty meant that state witnesses often

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98 Askari was the term used to describe turned comrades or comrades that willingly assisted police in locating, arresting, or assassinating underground MK operatives. The date when askari became the operative term for these individuals is uncertain.

99 At least one libel case has resulted from questions of the culpability of individuals who testified on behalf of the State or gave statements to the police following torture or prolonged solitary confinement. Bob Hepple successful sued the publishers of Ben Turok’s *Nothing But the Truth*. 
played a subtle game. State witnesses could deflect blame for the accused by taking personal responsibility for things that others did, they could sabotage their testimony by riddling it with contradictions, or they could conceal the role of others by telling half-truths and outright lies.

By all indications, Davids did just that by concealing the fact that another attendee, James April, had read the first chapter of Guerrilla Warfare by Che Guevara aloud to literate and illiterate attendees. In subsequent interviews April praised Davids for keeping this “smoking gun” out of the hands of the prosecution.100 The concealment of this recitation also suggests that Davids was far more familiar with at least a textbook knowledge of guerrilla warfare than he was willing to admit in court. Playing dumb allowed him more room for maneuver as he tried to sustain his image as an apolitical innocent against ever more incisive lines of questioning by the prosecution and the defense. But his strategy also included shielding a free comrade from arrest.

Unlike Davids, Nboxele was not detained under the 90 Day Detention law. Instead he was visited three times during the six months after the camp and gave several statements to the police.101 Although the threat of detention hung over him, his statements and subsequent testimony give a more untutored vision of what he knew about guerrilla warfare, because he was not an instructor like

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Please see the note pasted inside the cover of Turok’s book held at the Jager African Studies Library at the University of Cape Town. Turok, Ben. 2003. Nothing But the Truth. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball. 118. The court forced Turok to correct the assertion that Hepple had willingly given a statement to the police.

100 James April, interview with author, 4/30/08.

Davids, probably had less to offer to police, and thus would make a less credible witness. This did not make his testimony any more or less true than Davids, but it certainly meant that Nboxele constructed his narrative with different materials and under different conditions. Although Nboxele played to the prejudices of the court, giving a more convincing performance as a hapless rube, glossing one term for another, and tripping over his own statements and those of others.

As mentioned above, Nboxele did not use the term “guerrilla warfare” when asked about the stated purpose of the Mamre camp, instead he answered that they were preparing “to fight the whites.” Interestingly Nboxele traced the origins of “fighting the whites” not to Goldberg or Ngudle, but to Davids, who gave a lecture on building field telephones. This admission not only weakened the link between Goldberg and Ngudle and guerrilla war, but it also contradicted Davids’ assertion that he played only casual role at the camp. Nboxele did claim that Goldberg used racial terminology, but it was not to describe the nature of the alleged “guerrilla war” he supposedly encouraged, but as a way of explaining the political philosophy of the Congress movement. In a particularly telling passage Nboxele recalled Goldberg’s explanation of Congress politics;

Nboxele: [quoting Goldberg] …We people of COD [Congress of Democrats] are living in difficulties because we are not wanted by the whites or Xhosas but are on the side of the Xhosas.

Yutar: Did he enlarge on that topic


Yutar: Did he say in whose favor the COD was?

Nboxele: He said the COD was on the side of the Xhosas. He read out of a book on Castro. I don’t know books title. Fidel Castro liberated Cuba.
Yutar: In what way?

Nboxele: Guerrilla war.\textsuperscript{102}

The non-racial Congressmen that organized the camp certainly did not envision a guerrilla war as a “war against the whites” but as a war against the racial segregation rent by monopoly capitalism. This passage begs a number of important questions about the discussions that took place at the Mamre camp. Did Nboxele come to the camp with his own ideas about a racial war, collected necessary skills, and then heard what he wanted to hear, or did Goldberg and Ngudle sell him a bill of goods by dumbing down non-racialism to make their politics more accessible to outsiders? Such questions are not simple semantics, they cut to the core of what it meant to negotiate a shared political vocabulary amongst a racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse body of partisans.

Further complicating matters, Nboxele stated that he had not known the terms “guerrilla” and “guerrilla warfare” prior to hearing them recited during a reading of Xastro’s Xuba, the mispronounced title of a pamphlet on the Cuban Revolution.\textsuperscript{103} Presumably, the readers explained the term to uninitiated attendees, but Nboxele could provide the court with only the vaguest definition of “guerrilla warfare” as “fighting in the bush.” Whether or not “fighting in the bush” was applicable to the situation in South Africa was an entirely different kettle of fish. Between his examination and cross-examination, Nboxele contradicted himself by paraphrasing Goldberg’s interpretation of the text in two ways, first,

\textsuperscript{102} Nboxele, Caswell. 1965. \emph{Rivonia Trial Testimony}. Bellville: Mayibuye Center Archives.

\textsuperscript{103} Denis Goldberg, interview with Howard Barrell, 2-7-90. In the Xhosa language, the letter ‘x’ denotes a click. This click is often transliterated into a hard ‘c’ in the English language.
quoting him as saying it would be difficult to fight a guerrilla war in South Africa, but that if they followed instructions “they could fight and get through,” and, second, while under cross-examination, quoting him as saying that guerrilla warfare “was no good because bush was not dense enough.” After this second quote, Nboxele, apparently lost in all his glossing between terms, confessed, “I don’t know if he [Goldberg] was training guerrillas. If I was interested to learn more I would have learned a lot more.” This confusion extended even to the status of these texts. Nboxele questioned “Xastro’s Xuba,” and a veiled reference to April’s reading of Guerrilla Warfare by stating;

“I know only of Fidel Castro’s book and another book read by James Apie [April] – don’t know if that was a short story or not. I don’t know if Castro’s book was a short story. It was a description of how he got freedom for his people—I got impression we were being taught g/warfare [guerrilla warfare] from that book. I am not certain.”

Goldberg’s testimony contains all the usual defenses expected of a man on trial for a capital offense. Most questions did not revolve around Mamre but on his role as a technical officer in MK working in the underground around Johannesburg. But like the witnesses for the prosecution, he could not help but enter into a dialog with prosecutors about the purpose and meaning of the Mamre camp. His strategy was clear, when unable to shift the discussion toward politics, he placed the Mamre camp in the context of earlier camps and social groups like the Modern Youth Society Easter holiday camps and the Nyanga Social and Cultural Organization gatherings. He stressed elements of the camp that Davids and Nboxele overlooked; the campers listened to records and sang,

there was an area set up for volleyball, and they planned to stage a tableau of African and American history entitled “The Winds of Change.” Goldberg admitted that first aid, telephony, and motor mechanics were all part of the curriculum, but placed that curriculum not as a preparation for guerrilla war, but as a routine part of political education for the now-banned Congress movement. If there was a conspiratorial air to the Mamre camp, it was not because they were secretly planning to do illegal things, it was because once legal things now had to be done in secret.  

But all these mundane details did not explain why Goldberg lined the attendees into spans of four, elect sergeants for each span, and then asked attendees to refer to him as Comrade Commandant. To an educated eye, this resembled the formation of a British army platoon. Accordingly, advocate Krog focused on “comrade” and “commandant” as not only markers of military discipline, but terms linking the Mamre camp to an externally orchestrated guerrilla campaign. Goldberg refused to yield to this interpretation, arguing that these were not military terms at all, comrade was a marker of friendship among equals, while “commandant” and “sergeant” were temporary titles meant to maintain a disciplined and orderly environment—not altogether different than Boy Scouts jamboree. In a particularly telling bit of dialogue, Krog tested the rationale for these terms;

Krog:  Mr Goldberg do you know Afrikaans?

Goldberg: Ek kan Afrikaans praat.

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Krog: Well I think to denote a rank of equals, I think if you had told those people in the Camps they could just call him “Du Pallie” that would…

Goldberg: Undignified!

Krog: Oh I see!—undignified. The camp was on a dignified basis too?

Goldberg: Certainly, we are serious politicians and we are dignified.106

When pressed again, Goldberg told Krog that he had been known as “Comrade Denis” for years and that comrade was the operative term for allies within the Congress movement. The defense warned Goldberg against wisecracking in court, but he could not resist this opportunity to exchange blows with Krog, no doubt an Afrikaans speaker. Although this passage demonstrates how Goldberg attempted to picture himself and his comrades as principled political activists, the real significance lies how it opens an oblique angle into the Mamre camp. Contrary to Goldberg’s inference that attendees were seasoned activists, his testimony suggests the opposite. These attendees were green, raw recruits, which made discipline a foremost concern, and that they were unfamiliar with terms of address befitting the political culture of the Congress.107

While “comrade” might have passed as an alien term of affection, “commandant” struck an entirely different chord. It was an incontrovertible sign of martial discipline which lent credence to Davids and Nboxele’s captivity narrative. Here Goldberg turned Nboxele’s cross-examination on its head. When the attendees first arrived at the site, they pitched the tents close to the

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road. Goldberg ordered them to relocate the entire camp further into the bush, a task they begrudgingly completed. Nboxele referenced this story to show that secrecy was paramount and that Goldberg was an unquestioned leader. Goldberg referred to this testimony to explain away his rank as “Commandant” as an ironic moniker closer to taskmaster than quartermaster. Although this was a dodge, the “commandant” story raises a few tantalizing questions. The attendees were willing, but were they committed, or even ready? Davids recalled telling Goldberg that he would attend the camp, but only if he could leave early for the Tweede Nuwe Jaar carnival. Likewise, Albie Sachs, another instructor, remembered that attendees had to be prodded awake with sticks during lectures in the hot afternoon sun. If the organizers were prepared to sacrifice their very lives for the cause, were the attendees casual participants more invested in symbolics than substance? Were they more “amavoluntiya” than Che Guevara?

Although Judge Quartus De Wet was convinced of their guilt, Davids, Nboxele and Goldberg neither confirmed nor disconfirmed that the Mamre camp was a “guerrilla training camp.” Their testimony tangled in on itself like a thicket of outright lies, half-truths, fabrications, contradictions and flights of fancy. These men served several masters, not incriminating themselves, lingering loyalty to comrades, and adopting a certain strategic persona. But beyond mere departures from facile definitions of “the truth,” this kind of testimony speaks volumes about the limits of speech among strangers engaged in illegal acts. The

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organizers of such camps knew the rules of conspiracy, and attendees were warned about agent provocateurs in their midst, who would coax out information from others by making grandly radical statements. And to restate the obvious, they were about to embark on patently illegal acts. If this camp was not a guerrilla training camp, it certainly had all the makings of a sabotage camp, and barring that, a training camp for underground propaganda work. Even in a secret setting, and in a cellular organization, organizers were not free to explicitly state the purpose of their actions. Instead they had to telegraph their intentions through gesture, inference, and oblique reference. The difficulty for historians is this; to what extent were these gestures picked up by attendees? What ideas about conflict did the attendees arrive with? And given the limitations on explicit speech, and guided by the rules of conspiracy, what ideas could they return home with? More to the point, what historical arguments can be founded on such shifting sands? This material raises a much more fundamental thesis; was the armed struggle even a stable concept, understood in the same way by all who professed to be partisans? To quote a contemporary of the Mamre attendees, who at the time was a junior member of the Natal Regional command, “…were we aiming to simply put pressure on the government—to force it to change—or to overthrow it? If so, how? I perceived these questions only dimly at the time.”

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Jail Diaries; Factography, Reportage, Dramaturgy

Unlike the Treason Trialists, the Rivonia Trialists were convicted. They escaped the death sentence, but spent about three decades serving out life sentences, and were released at different times and for different reasons.\footnote{The Treason Trial was the first mass political trial of 156 Congress Alliance members begun in 1956 and concluded in 1961. The trial ended in acquittal for all defendants after the state failed to prove that the political activity of the Congress Alliance constituted treasonous acts.} The theories behind their sentencing are too complex and speculative to address here. More certain is the legacy left by the first wave of prison diaries written in the mid-1960s. During the mid-1960s, through the 1970s and into the 1980s, these diaries became important vehicles for explaining the apartheid system and highlighting the abuse of detainees. Some of these texts enjoyed a truly international popularity, unmatched by works written in the same genre in other countries.\footnote{First, Ruth, 1965. 117 Days, London: Bloomsbury. Sachs, Albie, 1966. The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs, London: Harvill Press. Mandela, Nelson. 1994. Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Lewin, Hugh, 1974. Bandiet, New York: Random House.} Much of their popularity lies within not only their explanatory power but their emotional weight as compelling stories. The purpose of this section is not to question the veracity of these texts as literal truth rendered in narrative form. There are ways of addressing this question, but they are better left to another study. A more appropriate question is how do these authors work within the conventions of the genre while testifying about the recent past? These diaries intervene on the Mamre camp in two ways; first they blinkered what could and could not be known about this event, and second the author’s knowledge of the camp served as the pivot of emplotment.
Much of the following analysis is written within and against Peter Steiner’s provocative deconstruction of *Notes From the Gallows*, a prison diary written by Julius Fucik, a Czech partisan tortured and executed by the Nazis.\(^{113}\) Steiner persuasively argues that *Notes From the Gallows*, despite its claim to documentary truth, still falls within generic conventions. Borrowing from Northrop Frye, Steiner posits that Fucik wrote a romantic narrative. He then conducts line item analysis of this prison diary, noting along the way several romantic conventions. These are, in abbreviated form; a concern with a man’s vision of his own life as a quest, characters cast as good and evil, a questioning of identity, the bewitching, confusion, or metamorphosis of the hero, and a conclusion where truth, justice, or beauty triumphs over lie, injustice, or ugliness. Steiner introduces two nearly synonymous terms to better explain the way Fucik dabbled in literary tropes. The first is a factography, an embellished text assumed to passively relay a “true story,” and the second is reportage, a sort of chronicle of events bearing the stamp of an eye-witness author. Steiner does not reference dramaturgy, but as I will demonstrate, it applies to an unusual prison diary that intersects with the Mamre camp. Although there are faults in Steiner’s work, his application of Frye’s conventions reveals a lot of rhetorical maneuvers working under the surface of *Notes From the Gallows*.

Three prison diaries address the Mamre camp. In order of completion, they are *The State Versus Nelson Mandela* by Joel Joffe, *The Jail Diary of Albie*

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Sachs, by Albie Sachs, and The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs by David Edgar. These are very different kinds of works, but all share the romantic characteristics displayed in Notes From the Gallows.\textsuperscript{114}

Joel Joffe penned The State Versus Nelson Mandela about his experiences as a defense attorney in the Rivonia Trial. Completed in 1965, Joffe did not publish the manuscript until the late 1980s. In a 2007 edition of The State Versus Nelson Mandela, Joffe explains his reluctance to publish the book as an act of respect for his clients who remained in prison. Likewise, Joffe did not write The State Versus Nelson Mandela while in prison, nor did he ever serve any sentence. It might be useful to think of The State Versus Nelson Mandela as a kind of desk novel, written during an authoritarian present, but cached away for a more open future. But Joffe has little in common with dissident Soviet writers like Andrei Platonov, Mikhail Bulgakov and Nadezhda Mandelstam. He was not commenting on the apartheid bureaucracy per se, he did not write an allegory, and his focus was not on a personal tragedy. Further, he was free to leave South Africa, and the authoritarian culture of apartheid and the Soviet bureaucracy were vastly different animals.

The State Versus Nelson Mandela may not be a desk novel in the strictest sense of the term, but nevertheless exhibits some of the factographic characteristics noted in prison diaries. Joffe wants to recount all of the behind-the-scenes facts of the trial, free from arbitrary rules of evidence, the hostile

press, and the rhetorical smoke and mirrors of the prosecution. But his text is more than a mere exposé. Denied a fair trial, Joffe uses his manuscript to retry his case. In the process, he resorts to many of the usual conventions of the romantic narrative, the most significant among these being character development along Manichean lines. Swanepoel, Yutar, and Krog appear as morally bankrupt henchmen, while Mandela, Sisulu, and others, although not entirely saintly, certainly fit the bill as stoic martyrs. Further, Joffe is not boastful about his achievements, and does not cast himself as a reluctant hero, but his position as narrator makes him a kind of invisible protagonist locked into a legal quest.

Like Frye’s romantic hero, and Steiner’s reading of Fucik, Joffe fell into a kind of confusion during the trial. Although he was a respected member of the legal fraternity, he was not a “fighting lawyer” like Bram Fischer, Joe Slovo, and Victor Berrange. As an outsider he was not privy to many activities, nor was he necessarily an advocate for their brand of politics beyond a lawyerly respect for legal procedure and an intense dislike of apartheid. It is not known how much the accused told him, but prison authorities listened in on consultations with his clients, a surveillance which severely limited attorney-client privileges. Further, other MK combatants were reluctant to talk to Joffe, despite the fact that he was an attorney for their comrades. Joffe registered his frustration when interviewing MK members about the prosecution’s star witness, and turned comrade, Bruno Mtolo. Joffe writes, “I went off to Pietermaritzburg… to find something more

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115 Political activists used the term ‘fighting lawyer’ to describe lawyers who were also members of the South African Communist Party.
about this mysterious character and his testimony [Mtolo]…. When I returned from the interview, I knew little more than when I went down.”¹¹⁶ Joffe probably knew more about the Mamre camp than he revealed in court, but there were layers of confidence between council and clients. Although it would be a stretch to compare his position to that of Ginzburg’s inquisitor, he certainly negotiated with his clients over the meaning of secret acts. This negotiation was part of an unresolved process of “discovery” that occurred not only between the defense and the prosecution, but also between the defense and their clients. This incomplete “discovery,” taken together with his clients’ desire to put politics at the forefront of their defense, meant that he could put forward only a limited knowledge of the “true” nature of the Mamre camp.

The dramatic flourishes that make *The State Versus Nelson Mandela* a compelling read also suggest that Joffe’s choice of genre was calculated to generate international appeal. Given this objective, it is important to note that a silent partner wrote alongside Joffe. As Joffe reveals in his introduction, his text was as much a result of his authorship as that of Lionel Bernstein.¹¹⁷ Bernstein, among other exploits, edited Fighting Talk, a broadsheet written by members of the underground Communist Party of South Africa. Although Joffe cannot determine which parts of *The State Versus Nelson Mandela* belong to whom, it is safe to say Bernstein did not miss this opportunity to broadcast his perspective on the trial. This does not make *The State Versus Nelson Mandela* mere

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agitprop, but the general narrative arc suggests that these authors imagined a particular international audience, and tailored facts to fit it. Assuming that the Mamre camp was a guerrilla training camp, would broad-based international solidarity suffer if evidence of armed struggle stood front and center in a sympathetic narrative about the Rivonia Trial?

Unlike Joffe and Bernstein, Albie Sachs placed the Mamre camp at the center of *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*, an account of the 130 days he spent in solitary confinement.¹¹⁸ Although Sachs did not indicate when or where he wrote his text, it was first published in 1966, and reprinted several times thereafter, making it one of the earliest and most widely read South African prison diaries. There are any number of reasons for this popularity, not the least of which is Sachs own biography; a young barrister detained under the 90 day law, his near assassination by apartheid agents, and his work writing the constitution and as a justice on the constitutional court. Biography aside, the real strength of this narrative lies in its ability to report how he evaded his interrogators, particularly when they repeatedly questioned him about the Mamre camp. By all accounts Sachs played a limited role at the Mamre camp, he attended for one day, gave two lectures on political economy and legal rights, and then left for Cape Town after the police arrived. He did nothing untoward, nor did he remember witnessing anything illegal. But Sachs' refusals and evasions become the device

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¹¹⁸ Sachs, Albie. 1966. *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*. London: Harvill Press. This introduces an interesting topic outside the scope of this paper. Given the strictures of prison regulations in South Africa, most jail diaries are accompanied by stories of their writing, usually on scraps of paper smuggled out of prison. The effect of these harrowing stories about writing imbue the resulting text with an air of authenticity. The question that remains is just how much of the 'jail diary' was not written in jail, but composed from memory after release.
that drives the plot along. His detention was conditional, his freedom depended upon answering police questions to the “satisfaction of the Attorney General.” Like Joffe, Sachs never placed the mantle of heroism on his brow but his position as narrator assumes that he is, at the very least, a protagonist caught in a just struggle.

_The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs_ is a chronicle of the secret world of police interrogation. Sachs reports on his experiences in two ways; first he details his observations about police methods, secondly he describes his own responses to these methods. The police know quite a bit about the Mamre camp from other detainees but they nevertheless pursued Sachs with a dogged intensity. What makes his story interesting is the transformation in his rationale for refusing to answer. Initially he wants to have his day in court, maintaining that if he answers any questions it will be before a judge after being charged. He later refuses to answer because of fear for his comrades, worrying that any piece of innocent information might be the piece needed to “complete your jigsaw” and make an arrest. But toward the end of his detention, Sachs realizes that he is the only person still held under the 90 Day Act, further, anyone implicated in the Mamre camp had either fled or was convicted. At this point, he refuses for refusal’s sake alone. Here the Manichean battle of wills between good and evil takes hold.

The police up the ante, arranging for round the clock interrogation teams, in an effort to break him. While not inflicting physical harm in the strictest sense, this form of torture pushes Sachs into a severely suggestible mental state, where

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he questions not only his identity but also his memory of events. At this point, interrogators leave him alone in a room with a document entitled, Addendum on Mamre Sabotage Camp. After imagining the dossier the police have collected on him, his interrogators entice him to take a look at a chapter, and perhaps confuse himself in its details. Sachs writes;

“The months of isolation had tended to wipe my mind clean of past recollection. The constant references by my interrogators to the Sabotage Camp was causing me to wonder whether or not I had knowingly taken part in a sabotage camp… Reality is something continuous and integrated. If one is abstracted from normal reality one has difficult remembering aspects of the reality of yesterday. Fortunately for me, however, they have not succeeded in substituting their version of reality for my vanishing recollection.”

He discovers that a handful of attendees gave information about him, but little of it was accurate enough for a conviction. At this climactic moment, Sachs realizes not only that his mind is sound enough to resist suggestion, but that the police already have what they need. They have tortured him for the sake of torture alone.

Sachs never reveals what he said or did not say after his marathon interrogation. He hints that it might be possible to hand police a few innocuous details, but fears even the slightest leak might be exploited for more information. Although we never learn whether or not Sachs made a statement, he concludes *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* after his release. Closing out the romantic narrative, Sachs vows to remain in South Africa until truth triumphs over lies. He

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120 Two psychologists from UCT were called by the defense to testify that solitary confinement can cause physical damage to the human brain. Their evidence was ruled inadmissible by the court. Joffe, Joel. 2007. *The State Versus Nelson Mandela.* One World: Oxford. 194.

waits for the day when he can confront one Detective Rossouw about the physical torture of two acquaintances, a double synecdoche for the entire repressive apparatus of the apartheid state, over the entire body of its victims.

The heroic narrative eclipsed a detailed description of the Mamre Camp. Along the way, small details wash up in the monologue, attendees fell asleep during his lectures, he warned attendees about agent provocateurs, and he remembered some of the curriculum. But Sachs’ refrain “I am not prepared to answer at this stage” is as much addressed to his readers as it is to his captors. He is circumspect about revealing the details of the camp to his public, probably because the time was not right. As noted above, Sachs contemplated making a statement but he worried that even a simple declaration might unleash other secrets, secrets he had not yet divulged to either the police or his readers. The reason for this reticence could be that the mid-1960s was simply was not the “stage” for a full reckoning of the Mamre camp. By 1965, Defense and Aid had become International Defense and Aid, the British Anti-Apartheid Movement placed economic sanctions and an academic boycott on the world stage, not to mention the fledgling solidarity campaigns of the ANC-in-exile. And the need for a compelling account of police interrogation and torture, put romantic heroism squarely in the center of his reportage from South Africa. Further, like Joffe and Bernstein, Sachs does not foreground armed struggle, perhaps because his appeal was attended to broaden support among more skeptical readers.

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Evidence for this theory appears in the text of *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*. Sachs signals his awareness of other prison diaries while contemplating the moral introspection that happens in prison. Specifically, he references Henri Alleg, who wrote an account of his experiences during the Algerian War, as well as Julius Fucik, who needs no further introduction. Sachs is not trying to place his own writing in this canon, although it eventually ended up there anyway. But I would argue that his name dropping suggests that he has been moved by his reading of these “sacred” texts, and implicitly expects that others will be moved by his own text. It is clear that Sachs understands the importance of these models, which, to borrow a phrase, are not so much an empire of letters, as an internationale of diaries.

In one of the more interesting sections of Jail Diary, Sachs imagines his life as a play a *mise en abyme*—a device that allows him to step outside of himself. Picking up on this thread, David Edgar wrote and staged an eponymous adaptation of *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* in 1978. Written after Soweto, Edgar is far less restrained about the place of violence in the anti-apartheid struggle. He knows little more about the Mamre camp, but he presents Albie Sachs as a protagonist who is more certain about the necessity armed struggle. His character suggests as much in a soliloquy;

It’s all too simple, to elevate our lack of courage to a principle, and call that principle non-violence. It’s all too easy, build your fear of being hurt and killed into a principle that people should not hurt or kill people who are hurting and are killing them. It’s all too, neat, to say

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that change must be controlled and ordered, that our world here can
revolve that far without a revolution, that crops will grow without the
plough, that we can have the rain without its thunder, we can seize
the sun without the fierceness of its burning.

I’m furious with what my jailors do, but not with what they are.

I hate the whip but not the men that wield it.\textsuperscript{124}

As in the text Jail Diary, the plot of this play balances on Sachs refusal to
divulge information about the Mamre camp. His interrogators refer to the ‘sacred
texts’ of prison diaries, ask Sachs if he thinks he is the “Freedom Fighter of
Algeria” or the “French resistor” under Nazi occupation, and point out that he is
not going to the gallows, “just the empty cell, and all those endless days.”\textsuperscript{125} In a
marked departure from Sachs’ text, Edgar’s character admits to the audience
that he will talk, but not before undergoing torture, this time at the hands of the
infamous Detective Swanepoel. The result is a tape recorded confession, played
for the audience over a darkened stage. Sachs’ voice details police methods of
torture and makes the singular admission, “The following statement has thus
been extracted from me illegally. On the 14th of December 1962 I attended a
camp near the village of Mamre. I had been invited to lecture on the history of
the white colonization of South Africa.”\textsuperscript{126}

Dates aside, the subtle changes that separate Sachs’ reportage from
Edgar’s dramaturgy indicate how much had changed between Rivonia and
Soweto. Like Sachs, Edgar does not place the details of the Mamre camp on


center stage. However unlike Sachs, he now hints that there was more to the camp than meets the eye. Indeed, Edgar may characterize Sachs in a heroic light, but he also allows him to strike a measured, but more aggressive tone on the topic of violence. The late 1970s witnessed the rebirth of armed struggle, after more than ten years of inactivity. Likewise, the Soweto massacre in many ways was a tipping point for international attitudes toward apartheid. In the face of these kinds of shifts, fewer could continue to support the idea that Africans acquiesced to apartheid, more began to see the logic of armed struggle, and a minority began to support it altogether. Acknowledging this new audience, Edgar does not explicitly state that Mamre camp was part of the armed struggle, but he certainly draws the two much closer together.

Edgar’s play was first staged in 1979, then adapted for the BBC in the early 1980s, and received a special audience in 1989, when it was performed for Albie Sachs as he recuperated after an assassination attempt by apartheid agents. This then was the new meaning of Mamre camp for the fiery confrontations of late 1970s and 1980s. The Mamre camp was still mysterious, but not so secret, and certainly linked to armed struggle. Representations of the Mamre camp served as the pivot that leveraged the factography of getting the record straight, to the reportage of getting the message out, to the dramaturgy of getting people in the streets. Throughout these genres and across these decades the meaning of the Mamre camp hinged on what, when, and how this event entered into public knowledge.
Plaster Busts, the Rules of Conspiracy, and the Action Hero

In 2007, James April recalled that when police arrived at the Mamre camp site they surveyed the scene and told the attendees, “look, guerrilla warfare can’t even work here.” Although this was a remark-in-passing, it nevertheless explains a lot about how interviewees craft their testimony about the Mamre camp. Beginning in 1985 and continuing to the present day, camp attendees provided their interviewers with a complex set of rationalizations about armed struggle. These rationalizations came at a time when the possibility of a peaceful negotiated settlement eclipsed the armed seizure of power. Memories of what happened at Mamre became intertwined in a contemporary debate over just what went wrong with the armed struggle, and how these frustrations folded into an ambiguous post-apartheid present. In this respect, camp attendees argued against not only the skepticism of the police who closed Mamre, but also with political rivals, factions within their own party, and professional historians. Interviewees share no single rationale, rather each puts forward their own ideas about why armed struggle was necessary, why it took the form it did, and how the Mamre camp fit into this broader picture. Returning to questions asked of the written record, to what extent does oral testimony allow us to see through these rationalizations into the past?

These interviews not only serve as another body of evidence, they test many of the assumptions that underpin the place of oral history in the social history of Africa. Recent scholarship has questioned certain methodological

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“fetishes” that preoccupy oral historians working in Africa. Foremost among these is the idea that evidence precedes interpretation. Historians have fetishized African voices as representative of collective truth or an individual voice as experiential truth. The problem with these tendencies is that they take what people say at face value. This belief in the literal truth of oral history misses all the interesting ways people interpret the past as they recount it. The Mamre attendees are not only eye witnesses but also incredibly sophisticated interpreters of South African society who provide as much justification as description. In this respect, oral testimony is neither a corrective nor a complement to the written record. Instead oral testimonies are another layer of sources that are subject to the same rhetorical strategies that guide the written record that lies beneath. The extent to which we can see through these rhetorical strategies to the past remains an open question.

Denis Goldberg gave three accounts of the Mamre camp, one after his release from prison in 1985, another during negotiations in 1993, and the last with the author in 2008. In his first two interviews Goldberg responds to skeptics on the left and the right, providing almost sociological justifications for the armed struggle. While Trotskyites critiqued the Congress Alliance for prematurely abandoning the working class for the adventurism of armed struggle,

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129 Denis Goldberg, interview with John Pampallis, 6/13/85. Denis Goldberg, interview with Howard Barrell, 2/7/90, Denis Goldberg, interview with author, 5/20/08.

rightwing critics portrayed MK as a fringe group without constituency among the majority of law abiding Africans. To counter these claims, Goldberg couples a detailed class analysis of the effects of residential segregation with a blow-by-blow chronology of frustrated protests and strikes. Within this context, Mamre became the crest of a growing wave of militarization that swept the Congress movement in the early 1960s, which in his view, signaling both the theoretical correctness of the turn to violence that he interpreted was a response to irrepressible popular demands for armed struggle.

In his 2008 interview, Goldberg shifted his discussion of Mamre away from sociological justifications of armed struggle and toward the politics of meaning. In the months before this interview marginalized veterans returned to mainstream politics as partisans in a divisive power struggle within the ANC. These veterans deployed images of the heroic comrade during elections, and published a slew of ‘struggle biographies’ that mythologized armed struggle. In this moment, Goldberg used the Mamre camp to complicate the politics of memorialization that lay at the heart of this factionalization of the party. With a light hand, Goldberg works within and against the new heroic narratives of armed struggle. He makes room for the accidental by recalling that the camp was discovered after a comrade visited a local bakery to replace loaves that had moldered in plastic bags. He opens a window onto a moment when camp attendees fashioned their image of an idealized guerrilla from a bricolage of their readings of other armed struggles. Finally, Goldberg questions the appropriateness of expensive monumentalizations in post-apartheid South Africa by citing a poem by Brecht.
Drawing comparisons between officialdom in post-revolutionary Kazakhstan SSR and post-apartheid South Africa, Goldberg questions the wisdom of buying plaster busts of heroes, instead of bringing dignity and comfort to the lives of ordinary people.\textsuperscript{131} His answer is didactic; the Mamre camp should only be marked by a simple plaque.\textsuperscript{132}

The tension between these testimonies is an attempt to grapple with what another prominent MK strategist called the ‘heroic failure’ of the armed struggle. Goldberg attempts to soften the historical resonance of both terms. In his earlier testimony, the ‘failure’ of the Mamre camp was due to chance and circumstance, and not to the underlying popular legitimacy or the theoretical correctness of the turn to armed struggle. But in later testimony Goldberg allows the Mamre camp to be a less confident moment than would be allowed in most ‘struggle biographies.’ In this respect, he attempts to deflate heroic images of armed struggle summoned in the ‘useable pasts’ during election campaigns. The combined effect is a subtle, yet partisan rendering of Mamre, one that steers between the dismissiveness of critics and the mythologization by opportunists.

Taking a different tack, James April views a broad tableau of Cape politics through the lens of the Mamre camp. His testimony is not a stand-in for “the Coloured perspective,” but rather, a post-mortem of the Mamre camp, rendered in a relational analysis of Congress politics in the Cape. As he saw it, this political landscape was riddled with secrecy, intrigue and tangled alliances. The


\textsuperscript{132} Denis Goldberg, interview with author, 5/20/08.
personalities he referenced are not one-dimensional, and relationships are not linear. Rather bonds of friendship, family, and occupation form the counterintuitive threads that tied together the Unity Movement and Coloured People’s Congress, Stalinists and Trotskyites, and activists and police investigators. April presents the Mamre camp as an emblem of this subterranean world, where appearances and affiliations are often not what they seem to be. Without naming names, he comes to the conclusion that the Mamre camp was betrayed by a police spy. Here the Mamre camp is the final act in a sort of cautionary tale. People had ignored the rules of conspiracy and put personal reputations above operational secrecy. Put more broadly, the Mamre camp is a way of explaining how the Coloured People’s Congress fell apart and why the Congress Alliance never assumed hegemony in the Cape.¹³³

Christopher Mrabalala’s story is an outlier among other attendees, but represents a tendency in the narratives of many other kinds of veterans. Mrabalala’s not only includes details not mentioned by other attendees, his description of events directly contradicts the testimony of others. In both respects, his narrative is interesting not because it is truer than the rest, but because it is a highly imaginative expression of how a forgotten comrade makes sense of the armed struggle in the post-apartheid era. The points of disagreement are worth noting. Mrabalala follows other narratives of the Mamre camp until he comes to the incredible chain of events that followed the arrival of the police. In his version, police surveyed the campsite, then helicopters began

¹³³ James April, interview with author, 4/30/08.
to drop scores of police and soldiers, all attendees were ordered to cross a log bridge, at which point he dropped into the water, hid with only his nose above the water, and then returned to the campsite to remove guns. The scene he describes is a massive manhunt conducted by scores of police and soldiers. No other evidence, written or oral, corroborates any of these details, and much disproves it. Most informants suggest that the police left with only Sachs and Goldberg, and no one mentioned guns at the camp, the arrival of helicopters, or the presence of Mrabalala himself.

However tempting it may be to prove this story true or false, determining its literal truth misses way generic conventions are deployed, and the reasons behind these deployments. Suspending claims of historical truth for a moment, the contours of the story strike a familiar chord; the genre is the action movie, and the protagonist is the archetypical action hero. His he portrays his past self as a skilled practitioner of military arts, a self-sufficient soldier who can evade legions of police and soldiers through a combination of ability and sheer force of will. Most importantly Mrabalala uses this archetype to place himself in a historic event.

Why did Mrabalala choose to tell this particular story, and pose himself within it in this particular way? Arguably Mrabalala uses a form of storytelling

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134 The SADET volume The Road To Democracy states that Mrabalala left the country in February 1962, a full ten months before the Mamre camp, yet they include his 'eyewitness' account of the Mamre camp. South African Democracy Education Trust. 2005. The Road To Democracy: Volume One, 1960-1970, Johannesburg: South African Democracy Education Trust. 93. Archie Sibeko claims that he never attended the Mamre camp. This claim runs contrary to Mrabalala who claimed to have seen Sibeko there. Sibeko, Archie, and Janet Leeson. 1996. Freedom in Our Lifetime. Durban: University of Natal Press. 77. According to the Rivonia Trial record there were 28 not 36 people at the camp.
employed by all veterans. This form is especially common among aggrieved MK veterans who believed they were the sacrificial victims of the negotiated settlement. As MK veterans struggled to insert themselves in an ambiguous post-apartheid world, they adapted material from other conflicts to locate themselves in the armed struggle and explain the significance of the armed struggle in the present dispensation. These heroic episodes form the emotional weight in claims for benefits in this dispensation. The sentiment expressed in these episodes is that the teller is a legitimate, yet unrecognized soldier who risked his life for the greater good of an indifferent society. Although Mrabalala’s version of the Mamre camp is not an exact facsimile of any particular action movie, it certainly resonates with the story of John Rambo, another aggrieved veteran of a forgotten war.¹³⁵

CHAPTER TWO
THE SIGHT OF BATTLE: VISUALITY, HISTORY, AND REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WANKIE CAMPAIGN, JULY 31ST-SEPTEMBER 8, 1967

The official narrative of the Wankie Campaign is a chapter in the South African Democracy Education Trust volume The Road To Democracy in South Africa, an anthology bearing an introduction by former president Thabo Mbeki, and sponsored by a major cellar phone company and a bank. In this lengthy chapter, Rendani Ralinala, Jabulani Sithole, Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane construct a detailed chronological description of the Wankie and Sipolilo Campaigns, organized around topics such as deployment, engagements, casualties and imprisonment. Their underlying motive in reconstructing an oft reconstructed set of battles is to open fresh evidentiary ground and determine once and for all who won and who lost these battles. In their view, previous accounts cast these campaigns as failures because their evidence was drawn from contemporary propaganda, political broadsides written by exiled rivals, and pro-Rhodesian war literature. Their hope for a more sympathetic portrayal of the Wankie Campaign rests with power of oral history. Or as the editors state in the preface; “it is our firm belief that voices and/or experiences of ‘ordinary’ people, if there is anything of that sort, come much closer to the ‘truth’ than history books that lack their voices, however skillfully written.” Underwriting this argument is the belief that oral testimony holds the promise of a more comprehensive, if not

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authoritative, version of events—one that will no doubt transparently reveal the fighting abilities of these ANC and ZAPU detachments in a more positive light.

One of the problems with this sort of project is that its unreflective reliance on oral testimony tends to make a cardboard caricature out of combatants. Taking informants at their word leaves us with the images that they themselves construct; that of the forthright soldier that graces the propaganda leaflet, never swaying from his patriotic duty to prosecute this heroic struggle with earnest dedication. Arguably this is no better than accounts drawn from partisan sources that depict these combatants as amateurs sent on a fool’s errand, or accounts that valorize the fighting prowess of the Rhodesian army. I argue that the root of these unproblematic visions of this campaign is an uncritical acceptance of oral and written evidence as historical truth. At no point in these sorts of historical reconstructions do the authors wrestle with the stories told by their sources, or place these stories side by side and let them wrestle with each other. In the end, the authors craft sympathetic accounts by simply turning the unsympathetic narrative on its head, invalidating the written sources with oral sources, and reversing the valence of this morality play.

This chapter is a different take on the Wankie campaign. Rather than restore the image of the combatant through an inversion of one set of sources over another, I will demonstrate how an alternative reading of written and oral sources can take readers behind the representations that loom large over a severely polarized literature.
To get beyond this dilemma, I will present an operational history that foregrounds the experience of soldiers. The purpose of this paper is to bring visuality into dialog with experience, and show how that experience is then translated in oral testimony and the written record. The battlefield terrain shaped the perspective of soldiers in very specific ways. Reading across the breadth of oral and written sources, one gets the sense that while there is significant overlap between different versions of the campaign, no two accounts entirely agree. These incongruencies become all the more apparent when looking closely at eyewitness accounts of individual events.

Visuality also illuminates soldiers’ conceptual understanding of war. In an insightful exegesis of WWI soldiers’ narratives, Samuel Hines describes the tension between two concepts, the “war-in-the-head” and the “Battlefield Gothic.” Soldiers enter war with a “war-in-the-head;” an imaginary received from propaganda, and popular culture and past wars.\(^\text{138}\) This received image falls away when soldiers finally encounter the gothic strangeness of the battlefield in the present war. During WWI the imagined landscape of cavalry charges through open fields was shattered by an anti-landscape scarcely recognizable, and scarcely visible, from the trenches. In the case of the Wankie campaign, combatants could not sustain heroic imaginings received from Sierra Maestra mountains of Cuba and the jungles of Vietnam in an African landscape that screened what could and could not be seen. Their “war-in-the-head” of idealized

guerrilla warfare promised them invisibility through a mastery of the landscape, but the conditions of the bush denied them this possibility.

Evidence of visuality also reveals the imperfections and mistakes that are shaken out of histories concerned with overturning a prevailing narrative. Losing the “war-in-the-head” is above all else a process of discovery, one of learning how general theories of guerrilla war differed from the practice of combat in a local setting. This discovery did not come easy and was marked with trial, error, and disappointment. Reading evidence against the grain teases out those episodes when combatants got lost, separated, or ambushed or when their pursuers were within earshot and lost the trail. What sympathetic and unsympathetic operational histories have done is confuse the war told in these details for the “war-in-the-head” reproduced in testimony and record. The result is an all-too-perfect version of history that validates credentials without critically appraising what informants and documents actually say, rather than what they mean to say.

An examination of visuality also contributes to broader critiques of the reliability of experience as a source of historical truth. As Hynes notes “truth problems” are as much about “infidelities of memory after the event” as they are the “failures of observation and the confined vision of witnesses.” The written and oral record of the Wankie campaign is replete with conflicting accounts, wavering inconsistencies, and contradictory statements that, in many instances, have their root in the visual perceptions and misperceptions of informants. Foregrounding these discrepancies not only reveals how the literature on Wankie
became so polarized, but why several accounts taken from one side of the battle could differ so frequently and so widely.\textsuperscript{139}

Before delving into the substantive issues of visuality, experience and the battlefield, I will briefly sketch of the most significant events of the Wankie Campaign.

The reasons behind the timing of the campaign are contested. Those who portray planning as deliberate and careful, suggest that the Wankie campaign was born out of geographic isolation and solidarity between liberation movements. Beneath these explanations lies a closer reading of conditions within the army. After several years of inactivity factions developed in the rank-and-file, arbitrary punishment created simmering resentments against the leadership, all of which lead to indiscipline and mutiny. These pressures animate alternative explanations. Were leaders responding to rank-and-file calls to go home? Or was the campaign a convenient way to quiet trouble makers in the camps?

However much contemporary hagiographers reconstruct the Wankie campaign as a heroic confrontation, it was never originally intended to be an exercise in guerrilla warfare. The strategic goal of this infiltration was first to secretly establish a group in Matabeleland to assist with further infiltrations and second to deliver small groups to four regions in South Africa.\textsuperscript{140} The groups bound for South Africa would train recruits inside the country, rebuild the

\textsuperscript{139} Hynes, Samuel, 1997. \textit{The Soldiers Tale; Bearing Witness to Modern War}. New York: A. Lane.

underground structures, and receive guerrillas from outside the country. Both detachments were well armed and both had instruction to engage the enemy if necessary but were ordered to remain undetected for as long as possible while en route to their final destinations.

The combined ANC-ZAPU force was comprised of two units; the Luthuli Detachment, which consisted of around 30 soldiers culled from the Umkhonto we Sizwe, and Nkomo Detachment which consisted of approximately 50 soldiers culled from ZIPRA. This combined force was to split at two different junctures once inside Rhodesia, the first occurring at the entrance of the Wankie Game Reserve where 23 guerrillas would go west through Lupane to an area outside Salisbury where they would base themselves, conduct small operations, and assist future groups in transit. The second group of 57 guerrillas would then head south towards South Africa. Once inside South Africa, this southbound group would further divide into smaller units of four groups each bound for Durban, the Transvaal, the Cape and the Transkei.\textsuperscript{141}

On the night of July 30-31st 1967, both detachments scaled down a deep gorge, then crossed the Zambezi and entered into Rhodesian territory. They fought as a group in three separate engagements. The first engagement occurred on August 13th when the group bound for Matabeleland fought a seven hour battle with a patrol of Rhodesian African Rifles troops and British South Africa Police. The second and third battles occurred on August 22nd and August 23rd when the South Africa-bound southern group engaged Rhodesian forces.

After these much larger battles this group moved southwest and scattered into much smaller groups while Rhodesian security forces pursued them across the border into Botswana where they were arrested and tried, convicted and sentenced to prison terms on weapon possession charges.

The Wankie campaign failed to achieve its objective of establishing a guerrilla presence in Rhodesia that might operate as a conduit for further infiltrations into South Africa. Further, the groups bound for South Africa never arrived at their destinations. Looking at the casualty figures reveals the costs of this failure. Reports of casualties vary widely; ANC lists twenty five of its members as casualties, various South African government tallies of killed South African guerrillas range from 29 to 35, while other written sources inflate these numbers to as many as 47.\textsuperscript{142} Given that the ANC probably gave the most conservative estimate, if 33 ANC members were deployed with the original group and 25 died, only eight survived. Estimates of Rhodesian casualties vary as well; one Wankie combatant estimated 33 deaths but the Rhodesian roll of honor counts eight, a number which roughly approximates the numbers reported in Rhodesian army situation reports logged during August and September.\textsuperscript{143}

Bringing visualization of the battlefield into the picture adds an important layer to interpretations of the Wankie Campaign. In part it is possible to


reconstruct the war-in-the-head that guerrillas carried as they crossed the Zambezi because much of their prior knowledge of the battlefield came from mapping and reconnaissance.

**Topographies**

Visualization of the battlefield begins with mapping. The ability to imagine terrain, to orientate to novel surroundings, and anticipate enemy movements, all hinge on a merging of vision with cartography. Despite its importance the commanders who planned the Wankie Campaign lacked adequate experience in cartography. Ben Turok, an early MK member and an engineer with surveying experience, met with a commander after the campaign and in conversation learned that this senior person lacked any training in mapping and could not even read a compass. When Turok asked how they mapped their way through, the commander responded that “we didn’t bother too much about mapping.”

Turok bracketed this story within complaints about disorganization and his own marginalization from the planning of the armed struggle.

Commanders casually dismissed the importance of mapping because they erroneously believed that others had done adequate advanced reconnaissance of the area. Two accounts present illuminating examples of failures in reconnaissance overlapped with insufficient attention to mapping.

Thula Bopela and Daluxolo Luthuli, both veterans of Wankie, place the responsibility for reconnaissance squarely on the shoulders of Joe Modise, then the highest ranking MK commander. According to their account Modise allegedly entered Rhodesia with a recce group weeks before the campaign, returning with

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144 Ben Turok interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/8/93.
muddy boots and a report of positive contacts with people in Matabeleland. MK cadres doubted that Modise made contact with people in Rhodesia and named him Nyawo Zinodaka, an ironic moniker, undoubtedly made in retrospect, which betrayed not just his faulty intelligence but his sheepish unwillingness to join cadres in the campaign. 145

In a self produced film entitled The Luthuli Detachment, General Zolile Nqose, a commander in the Wankie Campaign, and later a general in the SANDF, omits Modise and instead placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of ZIPRA. Echoing sentiments made by other veterans Nqose asserts that different duties were assigned to the joint MK-ZIPRA command, and that reconnaissance was delegated to ZIPRA. Nqose recalled that when detachments crossed they found that ZIPRA cadres were not familiar with the area. In frustration, Nqose left with an eight person team of MK and ZIPRA cadres ahead of the group to survey the territory and recommend a safe route forward. He then sent four back to fetch the main group. These cadres got lost and Nqose went looking for them. When the team returned to the location where the main group had been they discovered that they had already left. 146

Taken together these accounts not only foreshadow the visual handicaps that plagued the entire campaign, they also illustrate the beginnings of a cleavage between the war-in-the-head that informed expectations prior to crossing the Zambesi, and discovery of the Battlefield Gothic that awaited them.


on the other side. The overlap between these stories suggest how failures in mapping, reconnaissance, and planning resulted in ominous episodes like Nqose’s team getting lost. The inability to visualize terrain caused more significant conceptual problems. This meant that guerrillas entering the field envisioned a campaign with ideas received from other wars, rather than seeing what lay before them. Fresh out of a training camp named Da Nang, when these guerrillas set foot on Rhodesian soil they probably still envisioned a Ho Chi Minh trail unfolding through a savannah populated by willing sympathizers.\(^{147}\) Without reconnaissance to the contrary they could not see that conditions on the ground precluded these plans from taking shape.

This is not to say those deployed in Rhodesia were wholly unprepared for the challenges they faced in Rhodesia. Graham Morodi stated that the Luthuli detachment spent a year “in the forest” in Zambia prior to deployment.\(^{148}\) Wolfie Kodesh also asserted that men that trained in the Soviet Union had trained in topography. But Brigadier General T. Nqapayi, another veteran, stated that they were issued school maps rather than proper topographical maps, while Morodi noted that both detachments shared one “very old compass.”\(^{149}\) Given that the detachments mostly traveled at night to avoid spotter planes, they were figuratively and literally in the dark much of the time, using stars to navigate their way through the bush. Bopela and Luthuli, two dissident veterans wrote about

\(^{147}\) James April interview with author, 4/30/08.


this kind of navigation; “we tried to follow the Southern Cross... but we were shocked to discover we were right back were we had started... navigating by stars obviously wasn’t our forte.”

The Bush

After splitting up in the Wankie reserve, both groups remained undetected until August 13th when the east bound group fought a pitched battle with Rhodesian forces. The south bound group, already deep within the Wankie reserve heard about the battle on Radio South Africa. The news report also mentioned that thirty South African guerrillas were headed towards the border. Over the next three weeks the south bound group was engaged in a deadly game of cat and mouse through the forests in the Wankie reserve and the dry grasslands on the southwestern border between Rhodesia and Botswana.

There are no narratives of August 13th battle, but veterans gave several accounts of the two battles fought by the southbound group. In addition to these accounts, Rhodesian security forces filed frequent and detailed situation reports while tracking this group. If these sources are placed within the context of visuality, narratives of heroism and anti-heroism give way. This not only opens a window on how landscape influenced perceptions of these events but reveals a tangled web of evidence that fails to yield to simplistic partisan renderings.

All these sources contain stories about getting lost in the bush. The vegetation was very dense in the Wankie Reserve, making it very easy for

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150 Bophela, Thula and Daluxolo Luthuli, 2005. Umkhonto we Sizwe; Fighting for a Divided People. Alberton: Galago. 77.

individuals to become separated from the main group. Where the bush was less
dense it lacked distinguishing features and landmarks which could be used to
gauge distance and mark the ground covered. Since most movements were
conducted at night this combination of density and similarity caused a number of
individuals to lose the main group. Once separated, they could not call out for
fear that the enemy might locate them. By the time of the first sighting of the
enemy, the group had already lost two members along the way, while
reconnaissance groups sent out to search for them also got lost.152

The bush enclosed those within it and limited their field of view, but the
lack of any sort canopy left their position exposed from above. After Rhodesians
learned of the presence of the southbound group they sent spotter planes and
helicopters to scan the area. To avoid detection, the guerrillas constructed
blinds, dug foxholes, and looked for sparce tree cover to avoid detection while
they slept during the day. This surveillance became evermore invasive once
they traveled beyond the southern perimeter of the Wankie reserve where the
bush thinned out turning to grassland and then brush on Botswana border.
These changes in vegetation are registered by the heightened tension conveyed
in several accounts as the group passed from the relative safety of the reserve to
the open spaces beyond. As spotter planes patrolled overhead guerrillas
tightened their formations and maintained “a state of combat readiness.”153

152 Patrick Matanjana interview with author, 11/25/07. Lawrence Phokanoka. 2007. Lawrence
Phokanoka. The Road to Democracy; South Africans Telling Their Stoories; Volume I (1950-

153 Cletus Mzimela. 2007. Cletus Mzimela. The Road to Democracy; South Africans Telling Their
About a week after radio broadcasts indicated their presence, the Rhodesians made their first contact with the southbound group at the southern edge of Wankie reserve. In a desperate bid to find food and water, three men tracked game to a watering hole while the rest hid nearby. Helicopters spotted the men at the dam and radioed their location to Rhodesian ground troops. Five armored personnel carriers passed the group-in-hiding while on their way to the dam. Shots rang out at the dam, the Rhodesians followed tracks back to the group, yelled for them to surrender, and then fired shots into the bush.

Accounts differ about what happened next. Secondary written accounts suggest that the group patiently waited for the Rhodesians to approach, repelled them in a hail of bullets, and then collected supplies and a field radio they left behind. While oral testimony tells a less dramatic story; the group remained in hiding, waited the Rhodesians out, withdrew to another location and then returned to the dam at night to look for their two men. The first version is almost certainly a compression of the episode at the dam and the battle that followed the next day. Why this compression appears in certain accounts and

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155 Patrick Matanjana interview with author, 11/25/07.

156 Graham Morodi interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/23/93.

157 The Matanjana interview held at the Mayibuye Center Archives indicates that the men sent to the dam had all of their water bottles, which were then taken after the two were shot by the Rhodesians. The interviewee conducting the interview is not identified.


159 Graham Morodi interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/23/93.
not others has more to do with narrative strategy than with the vagaries of memory.

Following game to the dam during the daytime was an act born of desperation. August is the dry season in Matabeleland; a time when seasonal river beds ran dry and animals congregated near any available watering holes. Rhodesians interrogated captives from the east bound group and surmised from those interrogations that the southbound group would be short on food and water. Indeed, this is confirmed in the oral testimony of several veterans; some noting that the group had not eaten for several days while in the reserve, others suggesting that they survived on leaves and rats. Given all this the Rhodesians probably concentrated their aerial surveillance on watering holes and waited for the starving band to emerge from the forest.

Contrary to their projected image as self-sufficient fighters, these errors suggest that the detachment found great difficulty living of the land. Planners had not charted the way forward, ZIPRA cadres had not made arrangements in advance with local supporters, and the group did not seem to anticipate the scarcity of water and game in the area. These difficulties resulted in risky decisions, like making premature contact unknown locals, shooting-for-the-pot, and drawing water from exposed sources.

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162 Bophela, Thula and Daluxolo Luthuli, 2005. Umkhonto we Sizwe; Fighting for a Divided People. Alberton: Galago. 59-82.
Not surprisingly, two secondary accounts employ narrative strategies to displace these problems from their accounts. The first account is Michelle Berger’s They Fought For Freedom: Chris Hani a school primer on Chris Hani, based primarily on an article written by Hani in 1986 for an MK journal. In a literary flourish of derring-do, the Berger recounts the encounter at the dam; “Chris’s soldiers were eager to open fire, but Chris ordered them not to. “Our bullets are precious,” he instructed them in urgent but firm whispers. ‘Don’t shoot until you can see your target clearly...’ Chris remained calm until some of the enemy troops stood up trying to spot Chris’s unit. His order rang out: ‘Fire!’ Two of the enemy soldiers were hit.” Both soldiers killed were officers and the remainder of the Rhodesian forces fled in fear. The compression of the dam story into a battle fought the following day turned what was a blunder into a hastily crafted ambush, one that demonstrated the brave assertiveness of the group. The authors of the SADET chapter borrow Berger’s heroic tone, and even append her version of events with quotes from interviewees, lending an aura of authenticity by invoking the immediacy of oral testimony. The only problem is that Berger and the SADET authors larded their narratives with quotations that are, in fact, descriptions of a different battle that occurred the following day.

The chronology presented in both the Berger and the SADET volume is at variance with a number of other accounts, particularly those offered by most

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witnesses. Setting aside questions of factual accuracy for the moment, the real consequence of this distortion is that it makes the first encounter seem too neat. From Hani’s article, to the Berger book, to the SADET chapter, the dam encounter is staged as a theatrical confrontation, where the guerrillas used their invisibility to launch a daring attack on an unwitting enemy.

A closer reading of the first hand account of veterans tells a different and more complicated story. After traveling all night the southbound group hid themselves and rested during the day. Alfred Willie, Christopher Mampuru, and Ernest Modulo left the group late in the morning, following game to the dam. Their intention was to find water, and they had taken the group’s water bottles with them. Away from the dam Cletus Mzimela awoke a fellow comrade and claimed he saw a radio antenna above the undergrowth. When this comrade disbelieved him, a second radio antenna appeared. Troops came close enough for them to see black berets and rifles while army trucks could be heard in the distance. Mzimela recalled that he somehow fell asleep after the soldiers passed, only to be awoken later by the sound of gunfire at the dam.

Morodi was close enough to see black and white soldiers and five armored personnel carriers pass by his location on their way to the dam. He could hear the commander directing his men to the tracks of the three that went to the dam.


166 Patrick Matanjana interview with unknown, date unknown.

When the Rhodesians returned from the dam, they fanned out looking for the others. Morodi claims that he and another comrade were seen by one of these soldiers, but that the soldier was too afraid to call to his commander. The Rhodesian commander then directed his men to shoot at the bush in the opposite direction. The group then took this opportunity to withdraw 500 meters to a wooded area where they dug foxholes and prepared for battle. Morodi claims that reconnaissance helicopters and planes saw them withdraw, but could not direct ground forces to their location. The group stayed there the whole day but the Rhodesians could not find them and kept shooting in the opposite direction. They stayed another day in the same location, but secreted away that evening when they heard a big reinforcement arrive.\textsuperscript{168}

Although one must read all these accounts with a certain amount of suspended disbelief, they nevertheless illustrate how the landscape screened the visible from the invisible. The Rhodesians were not only within feet of the group, but Morodi claims one RAR soldier made eye contact with him.\textsuperscript{169} Although the line about making eye contact with a reluctant enemy smacks of embellishment, it nevertheless operates as a device in a narrative which demonstrates the restraint and resolve of these men who safely retreated while the Rhodesians flailed about, shooting in the wrong direction. Although Morodi’s version runs counter to Berger’s more romantic vision of an impromptu ambush and a heroic rout, it still affirms the idea that these men were accomplished guerrilla fighters.

\textsuperscript{168} Graham Morodi interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/23/93.

\textsuperscript{169} Graham Morodi interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/23/93.
Read within the context of mid-20th century writing on guerrilla war, this episode depicts these men as archetypical guerrillas; masters of their environment, deftly moving in and out of view, screening themselves from detection even though they were initially caught off guard by the Rhodesian patrol.\textsuperscript{170}

**Training and Discipline**

The description of withdrawal also lends itself to arguments about the role training played during the campaign. Many commentators attributed the failure of the campaign to inappropriate training.\textsuperscript{171} The most common claim was that Soviet trainers instructed their African trainees in mobile warfare. This form of warfare was largely derived from the experience of Soviet partisans during WWII and was thus inferred to be ill suited for the realities of an asymmetrical bush war. Morodi foregrounds his detailed account of the withdrawal to counter these claims.

As noted in Rhodesian writings, the numerically superior guerrilla group could have mounted a successful attack on the eighteen Rhodesian soldiers but instead chose to withdraw.\textsuperscript{172} On the surface this seems like a panicked response, and it very well could have been. But Morodi narrates this withdrawal by appealing to their reading of the landscape. The group had been caught resting in a thicket surrounded by tall grass. As the Rhodesians searched


around, the group remained still until spotter planes and helicopters appeared overhead. Morodi suggests that the decision to retreat underneath a tall stand of trees was a conscious effort to seek adequate cover from the aerial surveillance. But since the forest floor was more open than the nearby bush, the men quickly dug foxholes to literally and figuratively embed themselves in the terrain. In this reconstruction of events the men resisted their gut instinct to fire back, and instead calmly applied their knowledge of tactics which in practice are demonstrated to be appropriate to the situation at hand.\textsuperscript{173}

The first full battle did not occur until August 22nd, a full two days after this first encounter. Aside from the superimposition of this battle over the engagement at the dam, accounts of this battle also carry contradictions in testimony born of visuality and the landscape.

Most accounts agree that after two nights the group left the dam and headed south to the Tjolotjo Tribal Trust Land. There they found a sparse grove of bushes, dug foxholes and set up a perimeter of guard posts. But the details of the contact are a major point of disagreement. Some said that one guard spotted the Rhodesians through binoculars then surprised the Rhodesians with a burst of fire, another account argued that the Rhodesians took them by surprise because one guard group did not camouflage themselves properly, another asserted that the Rhodesians heard guards bickering and surprised the group.\textsuperscript{174} All accounts

\textsuperscript{173} Graham Morodi interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/23/93.

admitted that the group suffered about four casualties in the opening volley of shots. The length of the battle differs, but by the end the southbound group killed two Rhodesian officers, Lt. Nick Smith, and Warrant Officer Timitiya. Guerrilla accounts mentioned killing fifteen other RAR troops, all of them black non-commissioned soldiers, although official histories of the RAR make no mention of these deaths. After the death of Smith and Timitiya, the fifty or so RAR soldiers fled, leaving behind food, uniforms, radios, topographical maps, the bodies of Timitiya and Smith, and Timitiya's gold watch.

The reasons why different accounts diverge at the point of contact again relates to many of the rhetorical strategies employed in narrations of the dam encounter. As in the dam encounter, disagreement in sources signals the displacement of events that do not fit certain kinds of narratives, while other events are expanded over these incongruent details. A lot of these histories are sourced from eye witness accounts that cannot seem to agree on even basic details such as who saw who first. But who saw who first is not just about gaining the initiative in battle, it also relates the importance of training versus discipline in the field. In many ways the way people chose to depict training over discipline and vice versa shape their ostensibly factual accounts of “what actually happened” and with it all of the judgments about the fitness of the guerrilla detachments.

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Sympathetic accounts such as Chris Hani’s written and oral testimony, the SADET book, and Berger’s derivative account, all suggest, in varying degrees, that the guerrillas saw the Rhodesians first and launched a pre-emptive attack.177 As in the withdrawal at the dam, they took the necessary preparations by setting up an all-round defense with sentry posts around the group.178 The SADET account describes how one sentry, Peter Mhlongo, spied the Rhodesians as they advanced on their tracks, giving enough advanced warning for Hani to call out orders to the rest of the group. At this point the SADET authors depart into an almost a novelistic description of Hani giving orders—he called on his men to remain hidden and in silence until the Rhodesians advanced within 100 meters. According to this set of accounts the men followed these orders, waited then returned fire, instantly killing the radio operator and driving back the rest of the Rhodesians.179

Alternative accounts hinge on the indiscipline of sentries. When the guerrillas set up camp after their night march, they positioned the group destined for the Northern Transvaal at one sentry post. In Zolile Nqose’s film, The Luthuli Detachment, Alfred Willie describes how this group wore black jackets and


placed those black jackets overhead in the branches of a bush, presumably to shield themselves from the sun while they rested. Willie recalled that these men were warned about placing the jackets in full view, but that they refused to take them down. The jackets made their position clearly visible, both exposing themselves and the entire group.\textsuperscript{180} By implication, when the Rhodesians passed through the area they caught the group by surprise, launched an attack on this sentry post, killed Barry Masipa, Robert Baloyi, and Charles Sishuba, while mortally wounding Sparks Moloi and Peter Mhlongo. In one swift attack, the Rhodesians eliminated most, if not all of the Transvaal unit. These four men were the only guerrilla casualties incurred during the ensuing battle.

Bopela and Luthuli elaborate on this account but put a greater emphasis on indiscipline. Writing partially as dissidents, partially as loyal opponents, Bopela and Luthuli allow for more critical events than the final edit of The Luthuli Detachment and certainly Hani, Berger, and the SADET authors. These authors mince no words, “the first action we became involved in was the result of the indiscipline of a particular group.”\textsuperscript{181} Undisclosed grievances caused the Transvaal-bound men to threaten to shoot their commander, which is inferred from other accounts to be Manchecker, a storied veteran of many subsequent MK campaigns. Sishuba took over the group when Manchecker fled, but “feeling flushed with their victory over their commander, the group became absolutely

\textsuperscript{180} Nqose, Zolile. 2007. \textit{The Luthuli Detachment}. Cape Town: Qoma Films.

\textsuperscript{181} Bophela, Thula and Daluxolo Luthuli, 2005. \textit{Umkhonto we Sizwe; Fighting for a Divided People}. Alberton: Galago. 68.
uncontrollable.”\textsuperscript{182} Diverging from either account, Bopela and Luthuli suggest that the Rhodesians did not see this group but heard them arguing loudly. Again, this breech of discipline came with consequences, as the Rhodesians fired first at their position and lobbed grenades into their blind.

It is quite possible that all three versions of this event happened. Mhlongo could have spotted the Rhodesians, not had time to warn the rest, while the jackets and the loud argument attracted additional attention. Most of the southbound group probably heard shots after the initial contact. An official history of the RAR suggests that Rhodesians were tracking the group when they were fired upon, suggesting a properly staged ambush laid by the guerrillas. The contact diagram included in this history shows that most guerrillas outside the sentry post could not see the Rhodesians approach.\textsuperscript{183} Most guerrillas were positioned some distance away and dense brush obstructed their line of sight. Since dead men tell no tales, we cannot be sure what Baloyi, Sishuba and Matsipa saw or did not see when the Rhodesians approached. What is left is a imperfect field of evidence based on the limited experience of witnesses and post-mortem reconstructions of the battlefield conducted by either side after the rout. Few, if any, viewed the battlefield in its entirety, rendering most accounts partial, myopic, and conflicted.

\textsuperscript{182} Bophela, Thula and Daluxolo Luthuli, 2005. \textit{Umkhonto we Sizwe; Fighting for a Divided People}. Alberton: Galago. 68.

Genealogies of ‘Struggle History’

There is another way to read these sources besides from battlefield topography, vegetation, training and discipline. The heroic counter-narrative of Hani’s oral testimony, the SADET chapter, and Berger’s book all descend from the same source, “The Wankie Campaign,” a 1986 article written by Hani for Dawn, the official journal of MK.\(^{184}\) Although these sources vary somewhat in consistency, chronology and detail, they all share the same fundamental sentiment. Hani expresses this best in the original article; “We had undergone training in the Soviet Union… and had looked forward to this historical engagement… For a trained soldier it is always important to participate in battle because that is where you prove the merits of your training and at the same time there is nothing so scintillating and stimulating to a soldier as to test his whole reactions in actual battle, your responses when you are under fire. I think every soldier looks forward to this and we were no exception.”\(^{185}\) As in the dam engagement this narrative is designed to emphasize the tactical prowess of the guerrillas. This is not only a matter of record, but a didactic history directed at a frustrated readership in MK training camps the 1980s. But Hani’s article lived a second life as the source for subsequent official anthologies and school textbooks--casting this sanitized version of the Wankie campaign over a much wider public audience.


General Zolile ka Nqose’s film The Luthuli Detachment bears a resemblance to the lineage of representations described above, but this similarity is limited to sentiment rather than content. The Luthuli Detachment is a nostalgia film. Nqose conducted interviews with veterans, most of whom were commanders or commissars. He then edited segments of these interviews into a montage that traces the entire narrative arc of the detachment; from camp life, to training, deployment, and battle. But unlike Hani’s article, which is narrated by one voice, the narration of this film is split between several veterans’ testimony with segues provided by Nqose. This creates a tension between Nqose, who wants to anthologize the veterans as heroes, and veterans themselves, who are in turns both critical and sanguine about their experiences. Although Nqose tries to portray the detachment in the most positive light, his film cannot contain all of the alternative explanations of events offered by his interviewees. When read against other sources, Alfred Willie’s comments about the Rhodesians spotting the black jackets take on a different significance. Nqose shoehorns his story into the frame of tragic sacrifice for a noble cause, but if it is placed within the dissident frame it hints at tensions submerged beneath the surface of more heroic accounts.

Bopela and Luthuli expand on these tensions in their book, Mkhonto we Sizwe; Fighting for a Divided Country, a collaborative effort that promises readers “to tell it the way it was and not as we wish it had happened, or as somebody

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else might prefer us to tell it.” 187  Part autobiography and part exposé, the resulting narrative draws much of its rhetorical power from its authorship; Bopela and Luthuli are dissident rank-and-file members of MK. This authority does not make their narrative any more or less true than any other, but it does present an explanation of events that is wholly absent from the Hani lineage and almost displaced from Nqose’s film. Bopela and Luthuli draw a straight line between the authoritarian culture of the training camps and indiscipline in the field. Simply put, the Rhodesians spotted the group because commanders could not control those under their command.

The Chinese Kamikazi

The second battle occurred the following day, on August 23rd. After they routed the Rhodesians on the 22nd, the group left that night, they opted not to stay in a nearby forest and instead set up camp in a patch of bush surrounded by open fields. Accounts differ on why they stopped in this location, some say that carrying a wounded guerrilla slowed their progress, and others suggests that the location was less conspicuous than a nearby forest. 188  In either case, their location was fortuitous because the Rhodesians launched airstrikes on the forest at 4pm and 6pm. In between airstrikes two platoons of RAR troops set up camp next to the guerrillas in same bush. Their intention was to conduct mopping-up operations on any survivors of the airstrikes. John Dube, the commander of the

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southbound group, dressed in a captured RAR uniform walked into the army camp, and either spoke with some of the troops in Sindebele, fired upon these men, walked away without shooting, or was chased out with the Rhodesians in pursuit. The guerrillas quickly assembled an advance team to attack the Rhodesians. Once again they routed the Rhodesians, killed two officers, captured an assortment of supplies, and withdrew.

Like the two previous engagements, this battle occurred in very dense bush with limited visibility at close range, but in this case fighting continued on into twilight. This limited visibility and the abruptness of the attack not only left a bit of sway in eye-witness accounts, it produced one of the more imaginative situation reports of the entire Wankie Campaign. A report filed by RAR officers the day after the battle relayed an unconfirmed report that a Chinese commander led the guerrilla detachment. The next day this commander multiplied into two Chinese or Malay men and one Chinese woman were leading the guerrillas. A subsequent report repeated the same claim, only this time adding that “drug use [was] not discounted.”

Needless to say there were no Chinese guerrillas leading the group.

Nevertheless Rhodesian and South African security forces remained

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190 This quote was taken from a selection of Rhodesian African Rifle situation reports that were written between August 1967 to October 1967.
preoccupied with the story long after it was presumed to be false. Captured guerrillas recalled being questioned about it during interrogations and newspaper accounts sensationalized the confiscation of Chinese-made weapons. This fascination with Chinese intervention in southern Africa is seen elsewhere and draws from a Cold War imaginary of communist subversion. Ideas about the hidden hand of international communism lent itself to overestimations of guerrillas’ fighting abilities, but the real value of this story lies not only in what it reveals about the anxieties of security forces, but in a broader sense how bush warfare lent itself to the generation of legends.

The last battle was marked by two cases of mistaken identity. As noted early John Dube had discovered the Rhodesian encampment by walking into it while in an RAR officers uniform. But Dube was not the only guerrilla in a captured uniform. James April, one of two coloured guerrillas in the detachment, also wore an RAR uniform. As the advance team prepared to attack the encampment, April lept ahead, and charged enemy positions at point blank range. In most accounts, his gun jammed and was then pinned down under heavy fire when the rest of the team rescued him. Patrick Matanjana, suggested April’s light complexion and officer’s uniform and hat confused the enemy long enough for him to penetrate deep into their positions.191 Thula Bopela presented a slightly different version, suggesting that April acted rashly and wore a white head band that caused him to be mistaken for a “Chinese kamikaze.”192

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191 Patrick Matanjana interview with unknown, date unknown.
192 James April is referenced by his nom de guerre, George Driver. Bophela, Thula and Daluxolo Luthuli, 2005. Umkhonto we Sizwe; Fighting for a Divided People. Alberton: Galago. 73-76.
The idea that battle produces all sorts of figments of imagination is not a new concept in histories of conflict. What people think they see and hear often gets inscribed as fact, especially when these stories are accompanied with the kind of truth that can only come from eye witness accounts. But what is noteworthy about the “Chinese kamikaze” legend was that it so easily debunked but it nevertheless fed into exaggerated estimates of guerrilla strengths. Ron Reid-Daly, leader of the Selous Scouts, hints at this in his appraisal of Operation Nickel, the name given to the counter-insurgency operation that combated the guerrillas. Reid-Daly attributes unusually high RAR casualties to the fear and inexperience of African troops. These figures led commanders to the conclusion that, “the terrorists were credited with a military skill and aggressiveness that they did not actually possess.” Reid-Daly suggests that this overestimation led RAR commanders to misapply tactics learned during the Malaya emergency.193

Bopela hints at how this process of turning fiction into fact emerged from his interrogation by Rhodesian police. A homicide detective named Stanley Peters asked Bopela about Dube entering the camp in RAR uniform, and the presence of Chinese soldiers in the group. Bopela and his comrades knew that Dube blundered his way into the camp, and that April broke discipline by going it alone. But he surmised from questioning that the Rhodesians thought these actions were deliberate and a demonstration of determination and bravery. Bopela played along, suggesting that Dube had been trained “to occasionally do such things to put the fear of God into our enemies.” He also let the “Chinese

Even after the Chinese portion of the story had been discounted, the wild-eyed “kamikaze” legend lived on. April recounted that South African security police confronted him with a version of the story after he was arrested while doing underground work in South Africa in 1971. During his interrogation the police confronted April with a detailed description of his exploits in battle, and charged that had boasted to his comrades about killing a number of Rhodesians. April denied ever making such claims, and argued that he acted in self-defense during the attack. April traced the provenance of this story to Zolile Nqose, who escaped from prison in Botswana, was captured in South Africa, and returned to exile under suspicious circumstances. Once in custody April deduced he was the source for the South African version of the “kamikaze” attack. The implication being that the South African security police knew details about the attack that could only be known by eyewitnesses like Nqose.

These details of the Wankie Campaign proved significant during the trial because physical evidence alone was not enough to convict April of plotting to overthrow the government. But the addition of April’s activities in Rhodesia might result in a conviction under the Terrorism Act of 1967. Prosecutors relied heavily on the testimony of Leonard Nkosi, a Wankie campaign veteran turned askari. Nkosi testified that April had fired on the Rhodesians and single handedly killed

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194 Bophela, Thula and Daluxolo Luthuli, 2005. Umkhonto we Sizwe; Fighting for a Divided People. Alberton: Galago. 73-76.

195 James April interview with author, 4/30/08.
several, but under cross-examination he admitted that he could not see April, but made the dubious claim that heard a distinctive burst of fire from his pistol and submachine gun. In his final judgment, Judge Kennedy could not determine what Nkosi did or did not see during the battle, but was convinced that April was part of premeditated conspiracy to overthrow the governments of Rhodesia and South Africa. Nkosi’s version of the “kamikaze” story did not entirely convince Judge Kennedy, but it did play an important part in casting April in the image of an idealized “communist terrorist.”

From an evidentiary perspective, the “kamikaze” demonstrates how conflicting eyewitness accounts from a chaotic battlefield can reverberate through interrogation, court testimony, and rumor until they ring forth as accepted fact in the historical record. The abruptness and ferocity of the attack, combined with the dense thicket and waning daylight, made it difficult for the Rhodesians to see or to sure of what was seen. This is a moment of rupture between the “Battlefield Gothic” of warfare in the bush and the war-in-the-head that the Rhodesians carried over from Malaya and elsewhere. Out of this breech grew fantastical stories of guerrilla detachments led by Chinese soldiers who drove their men with an almost suicidal fervor. The retrospective process interrogation might have shed some more implausible aspects of these battlefield accounts, but captives were more than willing to allow interrogators to continue to believe their own fantasies about guerrilla strengths. These fantasies were then

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reinscribed in court cases where prosecutors hoped to win convictions by constructing the bogeyman of the menacing “communist terrorist.”

**Jailhouse Forensics**

The southbound group did not fight any other significant battles after August 23rd. They meandered around Tjolotjo eventually heading southwest for the border with Botswana.¹⁹⁷ All accounts depict a bleak scene; Rhodesians began to napalm the grassland and mopane trees to increase visibility and to flush out guerrillas, RAR units advanced to border towns to intercept anyone crossing over, aerial surveillance was stepped up, and the group was perilously low on water.¹⁹⁸ Making matters worse the landscape became more open and arid the closer they moved towards Botswana.

This change in the landscape required a change in tactics. The guerrillas moved strictly at night and became more dependent on local villages for food and information. James April provided a vivid description how different ways of seeing mitigated the risk of these nighttime visits, “We saw these little fires and we thought it could be the enemy camping out there, because we just saw these little fires. You see nothing else. You don’t see any hut, nothing! I thought, my word, I’m not used to rural areas like this! I’m from an urban area. But these guys know what is what, Chris [Hani] and them because they grew up in rural areas and they could see there is a hut next to that little fire there…”¹⁹⁹


¹⁹⁹ James April interview with author, 4/30/08.
The theme that connects various descriptions of the final days of the campaign is that of being lost in a harsh and undifferentiated wilderness. A few days after the battle, a few men fell behind, and the group split into two groups; seven sent to look for food and water, while the remainder waited in a dry donga for their return. According to April and Morodi, the group sent out tried to mark their path by breaking twigs and counting stones. But when they became lost in the monotonous landscape they fired shots in the air to communicate with the others only to receive no response.\textsuperscript{200}

The confusion caused by the landscape had a serious effect on morale. After separating from the main group, the party of seven also separated. April remembered that three men, Hani, Dube, and another ZIPRA cadre, left to locate a nearby village and find food. When these men failed to return, the remaining four began to argue over whether to leave.\textsuperscript{201} According to Berger, Hani’s departure left the four men distraught over the absence of their noble leader. Berger quotes an unnamed man implausibly lamenting the loss “How will we be able to carry on if anything happens to Chris? He is always willing to help us with our problems. I often ask him for advice, and he gives it to me. Where could we find another commissar like him?”\textsuperscript{202} James April casts the departure in a less cloying way. According to him, when Hani and the others left, those that remained behind immediately suspected that they were “gone for good.” April

\textsuperscript{200} James April interview with author, 4/30/08. Graham Morodi interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/23/93.

\textsuperscript{201} James April interview with author, 4/30/08.

chastened the others for doubting Hani but eventually they gave up hope and moved on. Other accounts indicate that Hani and his men were spotted by a plane and decided that a rendezvous with the others would put both groups at risk.\footnote{Ralinala et al. 2004. \textit{The Road to Democracy in South Africa; Volume 1 (1960-1970)}. Cape Town: South African Democracy Education Trust. 509.}

Various accounts ascribe different intentions to their escape into Botswana. Hani and others suggested that the foray into Botswana was a strategic withdrawal; after replenishing supplies and ammunition the men would return to Rhodesia to finish the fight.\footnote{Chris Hani interview with Wolfie Kodesh, date unknown. Duka, Norman. 1974. \textit{From Shantytown to Forest}. Vancouver: LSM Publishers. 90.} Mzimela maintained that the group did not know where they were going and stumbled into Botswana by accident.\footnote{Ralinala et al. 2004. South African Democracy Education Trust. \textit{The Road to Democracy in South Africa; Volume 1 (1960-1970)}. Cape Town: South African Democracy Education Trust. 508.}

But Morodi and Duka claimed that the men had no choice but to enter Rhodesia after Rhodesian troops entered nearby villages looking for the guerrillas.\footnote{Graham Morodi interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/23/93.} Whatever their intentions were, no veteran described this scattering as breaking rank, although many mention that they were eventually arrested as individuals. Most made it to Botswana where they were reunited in prison. Those unfortunate enough to remain in Rhodesia either were killed in pursuit, transferred to South Africa, or imprisoned in Rhodesian prisons. Those in Botswana received two to four year sentences, while others sent to prison in
Rhodesia remained there until independence in 1980, and the few transferred to South Africa served fifteen to twenty year sentences on Robben Island.

Upon their return from prison in Botswana, a group of Wankie veterans levied several severe accusations against the leadership in Tanzania. One version of these complaints came in the form of the Hani Memorandum, most commonly attributed to Chris Hani, but was said to be collectively authored by a faction of Wankie veterans from the Cape.\(^{207}\) The group named certain leaders and decried their lack of seriousness about the armed struggle. After this they were threatened with court martial, but were instead expelled from the organization. Interpretations of the memorandum ranged from mild critiques of planning, to calling into question the character of certain leaders, to dark allusions to suicide missions and the purging of dissidents.\(^{208}\) The authors of the memorandum only returned to the organization after the Morogoro conference, when many of their criticisms were addressed in a full strategic review of the armed struggle.

Veterans did not limit their recriminations about the failed campaign to critiques of the leadership. The process of reconstructing exactly what went wrong with the campaign began in prison as soon as it ended, and in some respects continues to this day. Some believed that spies in Zambia had given the Rhodesians prior notice before their crossing. Bopela and Luthuli follow this line, suggesting that the Rhodesians were tipped off and began tracking the

\(^{207}\) For more details on the history of this document see Hugh MacMillan.

group as soon as they crossed the Zambezi.\textsuperscript{209} They narrate their account by foreshadowing their inevitable defeat, the detachment was the victim of an elaborate hammer and anvil operation orchestrated by the Rhodesians who placed one RAR unit in pursuit, while another waited ahead. Advance notice meant that the Rhodesians could plot their movements and had a general sense where the group was and was going without actually seeing them. But a variety of sources, ranging from RAR official histories, Ron Reid-Daly’s analysis of the campaign, to situation reports, all contradict Bopela and Luthuli.\textsuperscript{210} These sources indicate that the Rhodesians did not know about the guerrilla presence until August 10th, suggesting that they were as surprised by the discovery as the guerrillas were at being discovered. This plot device works well in a dissident account preoccupied with conspiracy, but probably lends the Rhodesian forces a devious omniscience they certainly did not possess.

Other explanations of the undoing of the campaign look inward. The case of Peter Tladi, also known as Lawrence Phokanoka, presents an illuminating example of how eyewitness accounts fueled accusation and insinuation long after the conclusion of the campaign. Tladi, known by the traveling name Black Mambazo, lost his AK-47 on the trail about nine days into the campaign was sent

\textsuperscript{209} Bophela, Thula and Daluxolo Luthuli, 2005. \textit{Umkhonto we Sizwe; Fighting for a Divided People}. Alberton: Galago. 77-79.

back to find it, became lost, and a search party sent out failed to locate him.\textsuperscript{211} Tladi wandered for a few days before being arrested on August 14th by a railway security inspector at a siding. Eventually the Rhodesians turned Tladi over to South Africa, he was subsequently tried in the Pietermartizburg Terrorism Trial and served a long sentence on Robben Island.

At some point after his capture rumors began to circulate that Tladi had a hand in revealing the detachment. Graham Morodi gives only a hint of the rumor in an interview; after his capture Tladi was seen in a Rhodesian helicopter pointing out the crossing point on the Zambezi.\textsuperscript{212} Presumably, the Rhodesians went to the crossing point and then tracked the spoor that eventually led them to the guerrillas. It is not at all clear who started the rumor about Tladi, but it certainly circulated among the men in prison in Botswana and perhaps traveled with them when they began to be released from prison in Botswana in late 1969. Once out in the exile community, these rumors traveled widely and became a part of the unofficial reckoning of the campaign.

When Morodi was released from prison in 1971, he returned to Zambia where Oliver Tambo debriefed him. Tambo specifically asked Morodi about the cloud of suspicion around Tladi. Morodi dismissed the rumors by relating what Zolile Nqose had told him, the same Nqose noted before who escaped to South Africa, was held for three months, and was then repatriated to Botswana with secret instructions to lure the guerrillas back home. Nqose exposed the plot to


\textsuperscript{212} Graham Morodi interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/23/93.
his cellmates, gave them detailed information about the capabilities of the security police, and staunchly defended Tladi against these rumors. Morodi recalled that these strength of Nqose’s stories persuaded Tambo to change his mind about Tladi. It is unclear whether Tambo’s endorsement fully restored this Tladi’s reputation, but he later returned to exile, contributed to official debates on the armed struggle, and received honors and a post in provincial government after the transition.213

To ask the obvious question; was Peter Tladi flying around in a helicopter directing Rhodesian security forces? Rhodesian situation reports indicate that a captured guerrilla was taken to Victoria Falls and identified a crossing point. Given that Tladi was the first guerrilla captured, it would make sense that those in prison suspected his complicity. But beyond this assumption, and given the benefit of hindsight, there is no evidence to suggest that this captured guerrilla was Tladi, or that the location of the crossing doomed the campaign. The flight to Victoria Falls occurred long after the Rhodesians first detected the infiltration. Official RAR histories date the initial detection to August 10th, when a game warden reported the chance discovery of a suspicious set of footprints that led to the eastbound group.214

Given this, it is unlikely that anyone actually saw Tladi in a helicopter. But the transformation of an alleged sighting into a rumor about betrayal is part of a larger construction of the meaning of defeat. No one ever personally claimed to


see Tladi in the helicopter, and yet the rumors about him carried the weight of an eyewitness account. What may seem peculiar to an outsider—an eye-witness account without a witness—is a generic form of explanation that shapes much of the testimony of former guerrillas, particularly those that spent time in prison. Jailhouse narratives that debate the complicity of comrades are a genre of storytelling too vast and complicated to fully address here. But I suggest that these sorts of stories condense experiences of the “Battlefield Gothic” in the bush. Contrary to prescriptive accounts of other guerrilla wars, these detachments experienced a different kind of war, one that had local specificities.215

CHAPTER FOUR
LOSING THE PLOT: MYSTERY, NARRATIVITY, AND INVESTIGATION IN NOVO CATENGUE, MAY 1977-MARCH 1979

This chapter is both the story of how one training camp was bombed flat, and an explanation of how investigations of infiltration flattened the history of this camp. The training camp in question is Novo Catengue, a railway depot turned army barracks that operated from May 1977 to March 1979 in southern Angola. This particular camp is significant because it was a threshold; an entire generation of cadres marched through its parade ground into the ranks of MK. Known collectively as the Soweto Generation, thousands of young people left South Africa after the student uprisings in June 1976 and formed the first new detachments since the mid-1960s. Their entrance breathed new life into the stalled armed struggle, revived the international relevance of the exiled leadership, and held the promise of forming a youthful constituency within South Africa. But the camp also suffered an alleged poisoning, and was closed after an aerial bombardment by the South African Air Force. Despite the ignominious end of this camp, the story of the alleged poisoning and bombing are the most common ways of narrating this episode. Novo Catengue was both an instructive lesson on the dangers of infiltration, a justification for the necessity of investigation, and the perseverance of a just cause. In the end, the camp succeeded in turning students into soldiers, completing a transformation that

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216 This title is borrowed from Mwezi Twala’s dissident autobiography. Twala spent significant time in the camps in Angola, and was tasked with clearing land and building ‘The Plot,’ a secret facility that was known only to a few in MK. Twala, Mwezi and Ed Bernard. 1994. Mbokodo: Inside MK, A Soldier’s Story. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.
marked the beginning of an upward swing in violence throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

This narrative is born from investigative reports written after the closure of the camp. A long line of internal documents place the alleged poisoning and the aerial bombardment at the beginning of a decades-long chronology of infiltration. These authors interpreted the causes and effects of subsequent infiltrations differently, but all assumed that an unknown number of agents organized these first attacks, and then passed through this camp into the army. Accordingly, the incidents at Novo Catengue were the first in a cascade of occurrences identified as either suspicious or malicious. In 1981 security officials uncovered a spy ring, in 1984 they suppressed a mutiny of suspect origin, and in the late 1980s high casualty rates among infiltrated cadres warranted investigations of infiltration in underground structures. At each of these junctures the security department reexamined earlier events and saw patterns of infiltration that linked the destruction of equipment, to theft of supplies, to training accidents, to mysterious disappearances, to indiscipline and insubordination, to orchestrated mutinies and unsolved murders. At these three points, the commissariat, security officials, and commissions of inquiry called on witnesses to detail circumstances of certain events and speculate on their causes. Investigators then gathered this new evidence, referenced it against what they knew, or thought they knew about Novo Catengue, and wrote texts that connected past events and personalities together into conspiracies of varying size and configuration. Ultimately, their reports became genre of writing, a form of storytelling where all events had
causality, and the meanings of events like the alleged poisoning and aerial bombardment could only be interpreted through the frame of investigations of infiltration. I argue that over time the narrativity of report-writing fixed the meanings assigned to Novo Catengue. Narrativity structured this evidence in a particular way, making it difficult for historians to separate the social world of Novo Catengue from the rhetorical duty this camp was called served in investigative reports, and histories written from these reports.

The historiographical effects of this narrativity can be summarized in the following way. As each layer of writing and testimony accrued, it became more and more difficult to discern the relations that governed accusations in the camp apart from the kinds of relations that governed other times and places. With each passing retelling, the story of Novo Catengue became less an episode with its own history and own political valence, and more a way of explaining subsequent infiltrations by organizing a series of texts and testimonies into a coherent pattern within an accusation intended to convince readers. A backward glance across these references reveals the complexity and intertextuality of these texts; submissions to the TRC reference reports into a mysterious death in 1989, which reference security reports presented at a party congress in 1985, which reference interrogations conducted in 1981, which reference a code of conduct drafted in 1980 in response to the alleged poisoning and bombing that occurred in Novo Catengue in 1977. The combined effect of this intertextuality constitutes a circular and self-referential discourse, one that grows more confident and presumptuous with each layer of writing. In present literature
infiltration is a foregone conclusion and there is little ambiguity about causality. A symptom of this problem is that now one cannot speak about Novo Catengue other than first prefacing it as the entry point for agents who were responsible for the alleged poisoning and bombing there, and were later responsible for subsequent intrigues, murders, and mutinies in other places and at other times.

But the evidentiary effects of narration are more an opportunity than a problem. Novo Catengue offers a pathway into understanding how narration structures histories of the liberation struggle and the armed struggle within it. All of the evidence that references Novo Catengue—whether interrogation reports, conference proceedings, counter intelligence training manuals, security bulletins, oral testimony, TRC perpetrator hearings, and published memoirs—contextualize this event within their potted histories of the armed struggle. These potted histories pose a protagonist, the morally righteous liberation struggle, against an antagonist, the morally bankrupt apartheid regime. Infiltration becomes one of the main themes that distinguishes the characteristics of both protagonist and antagonist. Unpublished reports written in the 1980s set this narrative scheme, and truth commission submission given in the 1990s reproduce it by drawing upon these earlier documents. Over time neither body of evidence could narrate the entire span of the armed struggle without reference to infiltration, and the events at Novo Catengue became the first, and most significant, in a long line of crimes. In other words, if infiltration was the theme that united the last few chapters of the armed struggle, then Novo Catengue was the most convenient example for what lay ahead.
In reading through all these layers of writing, I return to the following questions; to what extent can we now separate the social world of the post-Soweto exodus from the rhetorical uses this camp performed in narratives about infiltration? Further, is it possible to rescue the specificity and contingency of this moment from later accusations of infiltration? The assumption underlying these questions is that the more the more people wrote about Novo Catengue the less their readers seemed to know about accusations in the camp. How and why this came to be is a matter that cuts to the core of the historiographical certainties that govern histories of the armed struggle and the entire liberation struggle. To introduce a problematic borrowed from an intrigue in another liberation struggle, “how do we write the history of the guerrilla apart from the history of the guerrilla war?”

What method might rescue the contingency of Novo Catengue from the way people write about accusation? Fortunately two separate genealogies of texts describe the events at Novo Catengue. Aside from investigative reports, Jack Simons recorded his perceptions of this camp in two diaries. Simons was a party stalwart and academic who taught at the camp during two separate stays; the first in late 1977 through early 1978, and the second in late 1978 through early 1979. During both stays Simons trained instructors in political education using a syllabus composed of materialist history, the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, and a review of ANC politics. Given his position as teacher of teachers, his diaries are a very intimate chronicle of everyday life in the camp, the relationship

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between the camp administration and Cuban instructors, and the theoretical debates that occurred during classes. Simons also gave very frank appraisals of significant events. These events included the passing out ceremonies for both detachments, serious incidents of malingering, indiscipline, and insubordination, and, of course, the alleged poisoning, known in later camp lore as “Black September.” Simons records only second hand reports of the bombing in his second diary because he was evacuated from the camp a week before the bombing. Simons’ diaries and syllabi began as unpublished documents, but were edited over two decades and finally published as an annotated volume in 2001.218

Reading Investigative Reports

What is the most useful way to read investigative reports turned memoirs? Given that so many of these reports were preoccupied with making accusations the ethnographic literature on witchcraft accusation is a useful place to start. The study of witchcraft beliefs and witchcraft accusations in Africa began with E.E. Evans Pritchard.219 Pritchard used local terms to describe witchcraft accusations but ultimately wanted these beliefs to seem rational to his audience. To do this he argued that Africans accept the empirical causes of events, even while they use witchcraft belief to explain why misfortune happens to one person and not another. Monica Wilson continued Pritchard’s rationalization, quoting her


informants apt logic, “I know that typhus is caused by lice, but what I want to know is who sent the lice?” 220 This sort of logic is all too easily shoehorned into accusation of infiltration in the camps; “I know that the bad roads cause car accidents, but why has this particular comrade wrecked so many, and who sent him to cause so many problems?” But Pritchard, Wilson and others do not go beyond who gets accused and why. Rationalizing belief does not begin to explain how written accusations constitute “the infiltrator” or how the narration of infiltration fixes the meaning of Novo Catengue.

The limitation of early ethnographies of witchcraft is that they neglect explain why accusations occur when they do. Mary Douglas makes this same point in a review essay.221 Above all else, she urges anthropologists of witchcraft to think more like historians, and place witchcraft in time. Nodding to the early work of Max Marwick and Clyde Mitchell, Mitchell argues that witchcraft accusation was less of a way of preserving the old order from change and more a line of attack when relationships are ambiguous. Her point is that anthropologists need to examine the symbolics of these definitions without returning to the homeostatic thesis. In times of flux, witchcraft affirms certain social definitions, while simultaneously amounting “to a denial of common bonds and responsibility.” Treating the witch as a symbol demonstrates how it shapes social definitions during moments of rupture. Symbols arrange boundaries, marking individuals as within or without a community, and this delineates how


insiders can cause harm in a way outsiders cannot. The import of this kind of ethnography is clear; investigative reports written after the discovery of spy rings or the suppression of mutinies develop symbolic ‘infiltrators’ to affirm social definitions.

The John and Jean Comaroff also place witchcraft in time, but see symbolics as less revealing than ritual.\textsuperscript{222} In their view ritual is “a powerful tool for making sense of the world, and expressing the meaning of novel conditions after dramatic historical changes.”\textsuperscript{223} Moving from semiotics into linguistics, the Comaroffs suggest that one needs to read ritual for all of the poetic tropes, juxtaposition, and redundancy that are “deployed to work their magic.”\textsuperscript{224} This approach has many implications for accusations of infiltration. Since investigative reports come out of inquiries and tribunals, what, then, are these bodies but another form of ritual, both rituals of discovery and rituals of accusation? How then might we read their written product, the genre of report writing?

As useful as ethnography may be for understanding the logic, symbolism, and encoded meanings, all these theories are derived from participant observation rather than written texts. This ethnographic literature tends to deal with accusations made in the present, in person, and as they happen, rather the


arrangement of a number of incidents into a convincing accusation, perhaps written years after the events in question. Clearly, there is a temporal dimension to written texts, especially those that justify their explanations by placing events in historical narratives. How do you detect the generic rules that quietly pattern this writing over time? What are the shared tropes used to connect multiple persons to multiple crimes?

Literary criticism of the detective novel may further these questions. It is tempting to call investigative reports one long detective novel, one written by several authors over several decades. But investigators did not adapt the detective novel to write their reports, even though Nelson Mandela, as commander of MK, was once dubbed the “Black Pimpernel,” and ANC used the term “red herring” in its submissions to the TRC. I am not making the argument that investigative reports are direct descendents of detective novels, nor am I making a claim that investigative reports are entirely fictive. Instead I am suggesting that literary criticism may offer strategies of reading both of these similar but unrelated genres. Both attempt to convince audiences of the validity of their conclusions by closing off alternative possibilities. The strategies of reading provided by literary criticism can reveal the historiographical after effects of this kind of closed text.

Investigative reports mirror features found in two eras of crime fiction, the “Golden Age” of the 19th century detective novel and the “hard boiled” postwar detective novel.225 Both forms of detective novels interpret evidence of the past,

attempt to debunk falsehoods, develop detailed arguments and offer convincing conclusions. This last point is the most significant; these genres are about formulating accusations that stick, and each form arrives at these conclusions in different ways. In Golden Age detective novels, the crime is committed in a hermetically sealed environment, the officially sanctioned detectives advance incorrect theories, at which point the amateur detective intervenes, discounts red herrings, turns clues into fact, and explains the commission of the crime by establishing motive, means and opportunity. Most importantly he or she sets wrong right by correctly identifying the perpetrator. Moral boundaries are never in question; the detective is unimpeachable, the victim innocent, and the perpetrator incorrigibly evil. The 'hard boiled' detective novel employs many of the same conventions but troubles these clear moral lines. These novels are set in cynical urban landscapes where the moral boundaries that separate detective from criminal are constantly in question. Detectives and criminals inhabit the same seedy space, and often trade favors for information quid pro quo. In addition to these trade-offs, hard boiled detectives employ the ‘police procedural,” an “excessively detailed official methodology” derived from modern science. Like the “Golden Age detective,” the hard boiled detective delivers a similar sense of closure but with a different combination of evidence; ill-gotten tips and scientific facts. Also breaking with earlier forms moral ambiguities remain.

Investigative reports exhibit elements of both periods. Above all else, investigators and infiltrators inhabit a world ordered on strict moral lines. As
guardian of the liberation movement, the security department writes itself as unimpeachable and presents its authority to accuse as morally justified. But following hardboiled detective novels, they establish the authority of their accusations by foregrounding their own ‘police procedural,’ a combination of almost infallible Eastern Bloc interrogation techniques, biography writing, and careful recruitment procedures. This structure runs through the entire body of investigative reports, and is only somewhat disrupted by victim testimony during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which inferred that the ‘police procedural,’ which may or may not have included methods of torture, itself interrupted moral lines.

Peter Hühn sees the detective novel as the authoring and deciphering of “plots” in both a literary sense and in a criminal sense.\(^\text{226}\) In this formula, detective novels are two stories in one, first it is the story of the investigation, and second it is the unveiling of a crime; a hidden story “authored” in the past by the criminal. This crime is a destabilizing event that upsets all of the “systems of norms and rules” regulating life in the community. When monopolizing the authority to accuse, only the detective can reveal the hidden text and thus restore order to the community. His discovery and reading of the first story— the hidden text of the crime— “reintegrates this aberrant event” and thus “reaffirms the validity of the system of norms.”

For Hühn, detective novels, with their stories about discovering stories, constitutes a hermeneutic circle. The crime is an uninterpretable sign that calls

into question the validity of the established order. As a consequence, everyday events “are made strange,” and lose the “usual automatically ascribed meanings and signify something else.” The task of the detective then is to break through the preconceived notions that hampered official investigations, and then illuminate the hidden clues hidden in the ordinary. Having gathered enough clues the detective then sets about sorting through different possible interpretations, reduces polyvalence to one meaning, and reveals the great singular truth that closes the circle. “The fundamental premise of the classical formula” Hühn writes “is that there ultimately exists one true meaning.” The closure of the hermeneutic circle is at the heart of how Novo Catengue gets flattened in investigative reports.

**The Police Procedural**

There are few uncontested details of “Black September” and the aerial bombardment. The total number of sickened comrades shifts from report to report, as does the number and type of planes flown over the camp. But there is general agreement on a few details. In the early evening on September 29th, 1977, a few hundred cadres fell ill with severe intestinal cramps and diarrhea. Some say the entire camp was affected, and others suggest that only a majority of cadres fell ill. Many mention the heroism of female cadres who assisted the sick, inferring that they were unaffected. Whatever their numbers the sickness was so severe that many were incapacitated. After some time Cuban doctors arrived, determined the cause of the illness to be poisoning, and administered antidotes. Most accounts credit the survival of the camp to the quick actions of the Cuban doctors. Investigations at Novo Catengue revealed the poison to be
administered in food, and the immediate consequence was ending the rotation of kitchen duty, which limited access to food to a handful of trusted cadres.

The bombing occurred on March 14th, 1979. Most accounts note that the movement had advance warning of an impending attack but offer different explanations of how they knew. All accounts note that in the weeks preceding the bombing the entire camp evacuated the camp early in the morning and disrupted their routines to avoid being in a predictable location at a predictable time. The bombing came at the precise time that the camp would be at assembly in the parade grounds. Authors include these details to infer that the South African Air Force (SAAF) had good information about routines, and that this information could only come from an infiltrator in the camp. Most accounts suggest that three people were killed, two ANC cadres and one Cuban.227 Accounts differ on the response of anti-aircraft batteries. Some say that one Canberra was hit, and credit MK cadres who fired their guns. Others make no mention the crash at all. All note that the immediate consequence of the bombing was the closure of the camp.

The first report written in response to these events was a code of conduct drafted in late 1977 and revised at least through 1980. Andrew Masondo authored these drafts while he was the National Commissar, and thus head of the commissariat at Novo Catengue. By virtue of his position, Masondo had an intimate knowledge of both “Black September” and the aerial bombardment and morale in general in the camp. He testified before a closed hearing of Truth and

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Reconciliation Commission that he wrote the code of conduct in response to the attacks. Early drafts of the code are presently unavailable, but several sets of written comments on the 1980 version survive. It is possible to infer a number of omissions, substitutions, and additions in the first drafts if these comments are placed against the final version of the code adopted at the Kabwe Conference in 1985. Above all else, these documents are early attempts to define crimes against the movement, establish the justifications for investigation, and formulate the procedures of tribunals. Likewise these comments are a reflection of official thinking on “Black September” and the aerial bombardment. In this sense these writings are the first attempt to uncover the “hidden text” of the infiltration at Novo Catengue. Following Huhn’s diagram of the detective novel, they also represent the failure of official investigators to solve the crime, and mark a moment just prior to the intervention of the detective.

Comments on the draft suggest an as yet undeveloped “police procedural” and very broad definitions of what constituted a “grave crime against the movement.” The comments on the draft record a heated debate over the necessity of definitions, the legitimacy of tribunals in sovereign states, and the severity of the penalties. Albie Sachs wrote the most critical comments. Sachs, a distinguished lawyer and longtime human rights activist, wrote that he had “fundamental reservations” about the document. He saw it as too severe, too premature, and perhaps disrespectful of the jurisdiction of criminal courts in

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host nations. Sachs was against the formation of tribunals, and instead suggested that most infractions could be solved with political re-education or simple expulsion. In his view, most crimes within the movement were too petty to warrant formal tribunals, while serious crimes had to be handled by courts in host countries. He does make exception for clear threats to security in combat situations. Borrowing from Frelimo’s experience of guerrilla warfare, “assassins” and “traitors” may be executed by the military, but only liberated zones and not in host states. But above all else he demanded a clear statement against the use of torture, and reserved capital punishment for the extraordinary circumstances of combat, or an immanent threat to the leadership. Sachs is unambiguous, the draft overreaches its authority, fails to justify the necessity of its severity, and collapses minor infractions into grave crimes against the struggle. His statements are a telling index of grave crimes in the movement at that particular time. In his mind, judicial procedure should be geared toward politically rehabilitating errant comrades, and aside from a few individual infiltrators, there was no evidence fifth column in the ranks. The language of an “enemy in our midst” is entirely absent from this document.

Comments written by the political department show the official mind of investigators. These comments clearly depict a group of novices struggling to define a grave crime, and instead broadening the definition to include pretty much any act deemed suspicious, granting them the power to detain people at will. The Political Department, the parent body of the Commissariat, stated in unambiguous terms; the time has come to “once and for all punish those who
have chosen to stand as barricades against the freedoms of our people. It comes at a time when a precise line has been drawn between ourselves and the enemy by the people themselves, without any clouds”.

Unlike Sachs, the Political Department accepts the draft but tips the balance of power on the tribunal; it should include at least one security official and one commissar. Since these two officials would be the primary investigators of the crime prosecutors would also serve as judges.

As these comments demonstrate, after the closure of Novo Catengue official investigators had few methods in their ‘police procedural,’ and no clear idea who they were looking for. As Sachs suggests the broad definitions of grave crimes allowed tribunals to assign severe punishments for trivial offenses. The power grab encoded in broad criminal definitions, resonates with infiltration in ZANU, where security departments needed to monopolize the authority to levy accusations lest accusations get out of control and damage morale in combat zones.

But contrary to monopolizing the authority, this heavy handedness and dull definition indicates that investigators had a real inability to separate suspects from innocents, and thus needed sweeping powers and severe penalties to control a situation they did not entirely understand. At the time the formal investigative department was under reorganization and Masondo, a former mathematics instructor turned National Commissar, had to set the parameters of

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investigation as the default investigator.\textsuperscript{232} Simply put, a trained body of investigators had not yet assumed authority for all investigations, and in the gap, the commissariat, a guardian of political lines, stepped in to install iron discipline by criminalizing minor infractions as grave crimes.

**Illuminating the Everyday**

This situation changed in a matter of months. The discovery of a spy ring in late 1981 signaled both the arrival of “the detective” in the form of the Department of National Security (NAT), and the first sign of extensive infiltration. The spy ring is significant for four reasons. First, it caused widespread paranoia among the leadership. The size and extent of the network indicated a coordinated and successful conspiracy, one linked to the events at Novo Catengue and was thus capable of inflicting many more casualties. This also was the first indication that South African intelligence services had a coordinated and long term plan to infiltrate the military and political leadership. Second this investigation provided security with an opportunity to deploy their newly trained staff, as well as test and develop the ‘police procedural’ given to them during specialization in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. Success during a time of paranoia lent security more authority to detain, question, and punish suspects. In theory their official role was only investigation, but in practice they could interrogate and punish almost anyone.\textsuperscript{233} Third the

\textsuperscript{232} Andrew Masondo interview with Hilda Bernstein, date unknown.

spy-ring sketched out a profile of suspect groups. The accused came from the best and brightest of the Soweto Generation, all had passed through Novo Catengue, and were quickly promoted into leadership positions. Two had even had positions within security itself. Fourth, and perhaps more importantly, this investigation linked events at Novo Catengue to ongoing infiltrations and began to weave a narrative of infiltration into summaries of the armed struggle. What we can see here are the first furtive attempts by “the detective” to see the “strange in the familiar” and illuminate a set of clues that might explain Novo Catengue.

This atmosphere of suspicion coincided with growing resentment in the camps. By 1982 deployment to South Africa slowed to a trickle and many Soweto Generation recruits grew restless after training for five years in the camps. Suspicion and indiscipline rose in tandem and reached crescendo in the Mkataashinga mutiny in late 1983 and early 1984 where nearly ninety percent of cadres in the camps rebelled, executed a few camp leaders, were suppressed by loyalists and Angolan forces, and several faced summary executions. Internal documents show a struggle over how to interpret the meaning of this event. An independent inquiry known as the Stuart Commission found legitimate grievances, abuses by security officials, and slight evidence of infiltration. Writing against this report, security officials defended their performance over the past few years, and maintained that the mutiny was not the result of growing resentment over the poor conditions and a repressive atmosphere in the camps,

but of a large, well-orchestrated, and patient conspiracy. To prove their accusation they gave the first instance of a narrative of infiltration and its effects on the armed struggle.

The most significant investigative report written during this period was “Some Aspects of Counter-Guerrilla Tactics Based on Our Experience” authored two months after the Stuart Commission Report and four months after mutiny.235 This document shows a far more confident investigation than the 1981 Code of Conduct. Investigators portray themselves as capable of reading the clues in the everyday, and thereby able to begin to decipher the hidden text of the crime. They narrow down potential suspects through a typology of profiles, an assessment of motives, and a clearer definition of different crimes. This is a document that begins to close the noose around those responsible for the events at Novo Catengue, “Black September” is referenced as a specific crime, while an entire category of crimes specific to the camps derives from analysis of the aerial bombardment.

How did they see the clues in the everyday? Investigators claimed they had the ability to read the true identity of infiltrators in the ordinary details of their biographies. Using a typology of profiles to interrogate and screen new recruits, investigators discerned two types of agents, the short-termers, who gather information or commit assassinations in a matter of months, and long-termers, or “sleepers,” who sought leadership positions and slowly orchestrated their crimes over a number of years. The typology explains their motives by virtue of their

class positions, short-termers are most likely to be lumpens or criminals swayed by quick money or early release, sleepers tend to be desperate workers or frustrated petit-bourgeois intellectuals, with ambitions for prestige or lucrative police salaries. Investigators also knew that infiltrators would attempt to hide their true identities using legends, but remained confident that their typology could detect the generic characteristics of these false stories, as well as in the discrepancies between written biographies and personal details revealed in casual conversation. The most successful legends used by sleepers were the persona of students or former Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) activists. Since most of the Soweto Generation was composed of these two kinds of recruits, and these recruits predominated at Novo Catengue, investigators clearly attributed the poisoning and aerial bombardment to enemies within.

Investigators also presented a more sophisticated view of “the crime.” After the spy-ring and the mutiny, in the official mind infiltration became part of a grand strategy of subversion. The enemy would continue to attempt massacres like those averted at Novo Catengue, but the ultimate objective of infiltration was undermining the leadership and demoralizing the rank and file. Beneath explicit crimes like poisoning and bombings, lay a subtext of more subtle implicit offenses, ones that were previously invisible to investigators. Spreading a rumor, crashing a car, stealing supplies or complaining about shortages, were acts of demoralization and could now get you labeled as an infiltrator. Where there was smoke there would be fire, so in many ways a high frequency of seemingly mundane problems could indicate the presence of short-termers and sleepers.
acting in tandem. Based on the past experience of the spy-ring and mutiny, investigators believed they now had the power to connect seemingly unrelated occurrences, and predict big attacks from a number of petty, but demoralizing offenses. In this new awareness a broken movie projector was no longer just a broken movie projector, it was a harbinger of mortal danger.

Some Aspects of Counter Guerrilla Warfare from Our Experience clarified the relationship between the spy-ring and the mutiny, and in this sense rewrote a new interpretation of Novo Catengue in these terms. Investigators did not reveal the names of those responsible for the poisoning and the bombing, but they clearly placed these events within this elaborate schematic of infiltration. In a list of “missions performed by enemy agents in the ANC,” “Black September” is the only event mentioned by name, while the precision of the aerial bombardment is clearly the result of inside information passed along by an infiltrator. Simply put, these were the biggest near massacres ever perpetrated by the regime. But as yet they are unable or unwilling to name the criminals responsible for both crimes. Part of this inability may be a function of this kind of report. It is more a training manual than a formal indictment. But another part of it may be lingering doubts about their powers of identification. They mention that sleepers have infiltrated security itself and are accusing innocents of being infiltrators. These ‘red herrings’ no doubt preoccupied investigators, and short-termers gummed up their screening. This document is less a lifting of the veil and more a finalization of their claim on the authority to accuse. Challenged by an independent commission that criticized its methods, investigators demonstrated their
capability by using their ‘police procedural’ to align numerous clues into a convincing, linear, but as yet inconclusive narrative.

In May 1985, delegates from all structures met in Kabwe, Zambia for the first national conference held in exile. With recent crises on their minds, delegates debated past mistakes, and suggested future reforms, but were under the watchful eye of members of security. First and foremost was a review of the Code of Conduct which was abrogated during the mutiny.236 The most significant changes between the 1981 draft and the 1985 draft are the detailed criteria for the use of ‘intensive interrogation methods,’ an ambiguous prohibition on torture, and a sharper delineation on the composition and function of tribunals.

Like Some Aspects of Counter Guerrilla Warfare from Our Experience security responded with a document that uses narration to assert both the effectiveness of its methods, and its moral righteousness. The Report on Security and Intelligence recapitulates the typology of criminal profiles but, for the first time, this document builds a chronology.237 It first cites “Black September” and the aerial bombardment as evidence of the mortal threat posed by infiltrators. The authors then turn to a detailed narration the investigation of the spy-ring, suggesting that it was part of a two-pronged to elect sleepers in the executive leadership by provoking a crisis, in this case a mutiny. This narrative includes a character sketch of an as yet unnamed infiltrator.

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236 This abrogation is weakly inferred in the Stuart Commission Report.

Above all else this document uses a narrative of infiltration to deny the existence of legitimate grievances against its authority. The authors introduce Novo Catengue as evidence of the mortal threat posed by infiltration and signaled the presence of sleeper agents. Since the mutiny was the result of a long term strategy of infiltration, the ruthless suppression of mutineers was entirely justified, and any attempt to curtail security, or elect a new leadership, would further the aims of the infiltrators. Although security officials acknowledged that innocents were harmed in course of both investigations, these abuses were isolated incidents, and calling attention merely sowed division, and again furthering the aims of the infiltrators. Despite these lapses, the authors write, “that the task of the movement and the leadership…” “is to defend the security department… and increase its numbers and improve its training.”238 In the span of two reports the noose tightens, the investigators have the means and the motive, all that remains is identity.

The Red Herring?

Commission of Inquiry into the Death of Thami Zulu, is an example of how a complex biography tested the limits of the typology of profiles.239 The subject of the inquiry, Thami Zulu, was among the best and the brightest of the Soweto Generation, quickly rose through the ranks at Novo Catengue, commanded a

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successor camp, was then deployed to the forward areas, and sent cadres and arms into Natal. But from the early 1980s onward the underground structure he commanded suffered an inordinate number of casualties. Investigators tolerated these anomalies until 1988 when nine cadres died in a single ambush. Security took Zulu into custody, held him for fourteen months, and released him. Days after his release he died under mysterious circumstances, and was ominously denied an official funeral. A month later amidst rumors, speculation, and a growing rift between the military and security, the executive leadership called an independent inquiry into his death.

There are two levels to the report. First is the investigation into the cause of death. Zulu tested positive for HIV, left custody in an emaciated state, and his autopsy revealed both tubercular spots on his lungs and lethal levels of a commercial pesticide in his blood. After a long review of the sequence of diagnoses, witness testimony on his conditions and treatment during custody, and a reconstruction of his movements after release, the commission of inquiry kept to the middle ground. It decided that AIDS wasted his body, tuberculosis put him in a critical condition, and inferred that diazinon dealt the final blow. The inquiry discounted rumors that Zulu was tortured or starved by security.

The second level of the report is a debate over evidence that Zulu had committed ‘grave crimes against the struggle’ and was thus a sleeper. This designation would illuminate clues in his biography, perhaps indicating his involvement in the poisoning and aerial bombardment at Novo Catengue, where he served as platoon commander. This independent commission was in some
sense a referendum on the effectiveness of investigative techniques. Security demonstrated the ability to critically appraise evidence and discount a ‘red herring.’ Security needed only the thinnest evidence of a ‘grave crime’ to bring Zulu before a tribunal, and therefore did not need a ‘smoking gun.’ But despite this low burden of proof, security released Zulu without charge. The commission even related how security systematically picked part the confession of a police agent who fingered Zulu as a spy. The conclusion of the report states that these were “skilled interrogators who prepared carefully, basing themselves on logic, probabilities and attention to detail.”

In terms of narrativity this evaluation of a suspect demonstrates the rejection ambiguity found in the falling action of detective novels. Although commissioners left enough sway on either side to suggest that Zulu was or was not a spy, its line of questioning is still locked into an either/or formula. On the one hand, the type of poison used indicated a method of assassination commonly used by South African agents, suggesting he was in the employ of the enemy, and silenced to prevent a deathbed confession. On the other hand, a skillful investigation found no evidence linking him to a “grave crime.” The report holds out the possibility that evidence may turn up in the future, but for now Zulu remains not innocent but suspect. The presumption in all of this is that conclusive evidence will eventually determine his guilt or innocence in terms of one crime, but in terms of Novo Catengue he is not “our man.” In this sense this is the penultimate chapter in the long novel of infiltration, where the identification of the true criminal is premature but both possible and immanent. The only
persons indicted in this report are the membership-at-large, who cast Zulu out of
their community using the unofficial category of a “not-cleared.”

Above all else the Commission of Inquiry into the Death of Thami Zulu
demonstrates power of security to exclude a range of possibilities, possibilities
that suggest a more complex set of relations. As Luise White noted, poisoning is
a crime of intimacy. This is particularly true with diazinon, a poison most likely
administered through alcohol. If Zulu accepted a drink, it was from a known
acquaintance. Was this acquaintance another agent, a jealous rival, a righteous
avenger, or a regretful friend tasked with a necessary duty? Or, transcending the
logic of the investigative report, the perpetrator encompassed all four of these
personas. Histories of other exiled liberation movements agree with oral
histories of this movement; old comrades might have suspected friends were
agents, but tolerated them for personal reasons or because they posed no real
threat. Accusations and assassinations only ignited when history intervened,
shifting the power relations that lay hidden beneath the face of party unity. The
last months of 1989 are easily characterized as such a historical moment,
although morally-inscribed investigative reports could not sustain such
complexities and still tell the story they do.

Spots of Blood

The ANC’s Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the
final chapter in the investigation into the events at Novo Catengue. This

240 African National Congress. 1996. Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
[online]. African National Congress. Available from:
Hereafter refered to as the First Submission. African National Congress. 1997. Further
document is actually two separate submissions, *The First Submission* was delivered in August 1996, and after further questioning by the TRC, *The Second Submission* was delivered in May 1997. These two submissions are the final expression of the narrative of infiltration at Novo Catengue, nested within the overarching story of the armed struggle, and within that the entire liberation struggle. *The First Submission* provides a long, elaborate defense against allegations of human rights abuses, presented before a commission purposed with finding a singular truth about such abuses. To contextualize abuses committed by the ANC the author gives a grand narrative of human rights abuses committed against the black majority, tracing a historical arc that begins with the moment of colonization and extends into the present. The ANC, as legitimate modern representative of the black majority, is the latest victim in this chronology of violence. The author presents the armed struggle as a justified response to the violence inflicted by the regime. Above all else, the ANC prosecuted the armed struggle with restraint, it remained committed to the avoidance of civilian casualties, and, in this regard, it stood above both the regime and less disciplined anti-colonial movements. The ANC never endorsed the torture of infiltrators or enemy captives as a matter of policy, and when abuses occurred they were the result of ‘bad apples’ or incidents when a ‘ticking time bomb’ threatened innocent lives.

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Novo Catengue is the lynchpin that binds these historical frames of reference with these moral justifications. As narrated by *The First Submission*, the armed struggle entered its most dangerous phase after 1976, when thousands of recruits brought an unknown number of infiltrators into the ranks. These infiltrators laid low until they orchestrated the “Black September” and passed on information that aided the aerial bombardment. These events were the opening volleys of “Total Strategy”, a master plan created by South African securocrats that coordinated domestic counter-insurgency, regional destabilization, and infiltration of the anti-apartheid movement. “Black September” and the aerial bombardment are key because they not only demonstrated the presence of infiltration, but also showed its lethality, and thus, justify the extraordinary excesses committed to prevent further attacks. *The First Submission* names seven individuals as responsible for both attacks at Novo Catengue. They include a camp commissar, a camp commander, a physical trainer, a member of security, a politics instructor, and an agent who fled to South Africa to become the first askari. The Novo Catengue case ‘broke’ after the discovery of the spy-ring in 1981. Thami Zulu is mentioned in another section of *The Second Submission*, and while never fully exonerated of his own crime, is not implicated in the Novo Catengue case, and appears here as a red herring.

But both *The First Submission* and *The Second Submission* leaves one question open; how did investigators know what they knew? The narrative given in *The First Submission* faulters a bit in *The Second Submission*, which was a response to a more aggressive line of questioning by the TRC. In response to
questions on the “excesses against cadres and captured agents” the author backs up his contextualization by summoning details contained in *The Shishita Report*, the official report of the spy-ring investigation. This unreleased internal report reconstructs the extent and activities of the spy-ring presumably on evidence obtained through interrogations of the accused. *The Second Submission* extracts details about one cadre in particular, Kenneth Mahamba. Mahamba was a graduate of Novo Catengue, and at the time of his arrest was camp commander at another camp. Once in custody, Mahamba allegedly confessed to recruitment by the police, that he received special training at a military base prior to deployment, and, along with other accomplices, poisoned Novo Catengue and passed information that assisted the aerial bombardment. According to *The Second Submission* a tribunal convicted Mahamba and he was executed along with several co-conspirators.

Contrary to the intent of the author, TRC questioning forced a mention of *The Shishita Report*, which then opened a further line questioning into the methods used to extract confessions, the reliability of information contained in such confessions, and the moral lines established by *The First Submission*. *The Second Submission* was supposed to supply additional details to support several assertions that abuses were isolated and never part of official policy. The author mentions *The Shishita Report* as a way of demonstrating an effective investigation into a very real conspiracy. Kenneth Mahamba was meant to serve

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as an example of the observation of codes of conduct amidst extraordinary
danger. But the mention of his name inadvertently connected The Second
Submission to victim testimony provided by one of his cellmates, who reveal an
alternative account of his death. This alternative account opened a breech
between the kind of stories told The First Submission and The Second
Submission. A former detainee testified to the TRC that he had seen Mahamba
in a detention facility just prior to his death. In his account Mahamba was so
disfigured by beatings that he was recognizable by his voice alone. Mahamba’s
last words to this detainee reportedly were “tell them anything they want to hear.”
Instead of a fair trial in front of an impartial Tribunal, this detainee maintained that
security tortured Mahamba to death. As The Second Submission itself admits,
abuses could occur when “a known infiltrator… refused to divulge information
despite being confronted with prima facie evidence.” The Second Submission
gave no indication what ‘prima facie evidence’ Mahamba saw or did not see, and
neglected to discuss the meaning of ‘intensive methods of interrogation’ allowed

Reading The Second Submission against testimony given in victim hearings
introduces an alternative interpretation that threatens to upset the entire system
of order restored by all these layers of investigative reports. Did the force used
during interrogation lead to a cascade of false confessions? If so, what if
anything do we really know about Novo Catengue? Since all but one of the
named co-conspirators were also “executed by a Tribunal,” the TRC had little
hope of further corroborating these claims through addition witness testimony.
And while the ANC provided The Shishita Report to the TRC, it cited concerns about the confidentiality of witnesses and argued that it not be released to the public. Aside from testimony from the detainee, and Mahamba’s own brother, the “author as detective” had eliminated all other possible explanations by eliminating almost all who could offer such explanations.\(^{242}\) The implicit sentiments of The First Submission and The Second Submissions borrow from a clichéd phrase often used in crime fiction, “that’s our story and we’re sticking to it.”

As noted by other commentators on the TRC, the breech between The First Submission and The Second Submissions troubled the categories of victim and perpetrator. The blurred categories of victim and perpetrator, parallel the moral coordinates inscribed between detective and criminal in the two types of detective novels. In The First Submission the grand historical narrative of colonial violence, and Novo Catengue placed within it, depicts a world of clear moral lines, with the ANC firmly positioned the high ground. The disbelief of the TRC, as revealed in its continued question, in many ways begs a rewrite of this story. And author largely does that in The Second Submission, even though they maintain that “this is a supplement to, and not a substitution for [The First Submission].” But the blood spots that drip from the mention of Kenneth Mahamba and the Shishita Report both suggest that The First Submission suppressed a much darker, much more ambiguous world, inhabited by infiltrators levying false accusation as investigators, and investigators making infiltrators out

\(^{242}\) Joe Seremane interview with author 11/13/07. Seremane gave similar testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
of innocents. When read alone, *The First Submission* does restore the “system of order,” but *The Second Submission*, with its link to victim hearings, leaves the hermeneutic circle wide open. Taking this beyond Hühn, *The First Submission* and *The Second Submission* constitute a palimpsest; as hidden clues are aligned into the explanation of one crime, they are arranged in such a way as to conceal another. The end of one investigation leaves the blood spots that begin another.

Are these concealments deliberate or a product of the mediation of texts through a narrator? As Hühn noted, classic detective novels are often narrated by an uninformed acquaintance of the detective. The uninformed acquaintance tries to decipher the incomprehensible investigation of the detective, while the detective tries to decipher the hidden text authored by the criminal. The archetype of the uninformed acquaintance is Doyle’s Dr. Watson, who, despite being a close associate of Holmes, is utterly reliant on the detective’s informed explanation of his investigation and the crime itself. By all indications the “Dr. Watson” that narrated *The First Submission* and *The Second Submission* is Thabo Mbeki, who, at the time of the TRC was deputy president of the Republic. It comes as little surprise then that the heir apparent of a party of state might be complicit in the deliberate concealment of crimes committed in the investigation of another crime. But at same time, Mbeki was a prisoner of the same frames of reference reinforced again and again in this genealogy of investigative reports. He had never visited Novo Catengue, he was not a member of security, and he was only privy to the details of investigations as a member of the executive committee and the politburo of the SACP. It is even possible to say that Mbeki is
not the narrator at all, given that The Second Submission is a response to questioning from another imperfectly informed acquaintance, the TRC. The result is a text that is mediated four times over, first by the criminal, second by investigators, third by Mbeki, and fourth by the TRC. In this way, Mbeki’s reading of previous these texts, just like the TRC’s reading of his text, is as mediated as our own, and their interpretations, just like ours, are subject to the meanings already inscribed within this genre.

Comrade Jack

In some regards the Simons diaries, like the testimony of the detainee, offers a way to step outside this dilemma.243 Jack Simons’ diaries not only serves as a counterpoint to the interpretations of the alleged poisoning and aerial bombardment, but also goes beyond these narrow concerns to capture something of the complex set of relations and negotiations that governed Novo Catengue. Reading the diaries against investigative reports is not another attempt to ‘lift the veil’ and rewrite the last chapter of this detective novel. Neither Simons nor I play the role of Dr. Watson in the sense that either of us pose the second genealogy as the “real solution” to the mysteries that preoccupy the first genealogy. To start with, the Simons diaries are hardly conclusive. These texts leave more questions than they answer, but pose the kind of questions left out of investigative reports. Further, I do not assume that the authors of diaries passively and impartially record all the details that they witness. Diaries are as

mediated as other texts, they contain omissions and displacements, and they are limited by the perceptions of the author. But diaries are subject to certain documentary conventions. They are detailed chronicles limited by what can be known in present. In this sense, the author of a diary surrenders a certain amount of authority over the narrative arc of their text, allowing for number of loose ends often closed in investigative reports.

Above all else the Simons diaries capture the moment after Soweto. Likewise understanding this moment is the key to understanding “Black September” and aerial bombardment. Scholars often pose Soweto as the event of the 1970s, but assign it different meanings. For Baruch Hirson, a longtime Trotskyite academic, Soweto demonstrated the poverty of Black Consciousness as an ideology. The student revolt was spontaneous violence uniformed by Marxist theory. Gail Gerhart took the opposite view, arguing that Black Consciousness had sophisticated vision for post-apartheid future, one that had currency among an influential black elite. The significance in terms of the Simons diary is clear, this debate among scholars paralleled arguments going on in political education classes at Novo Catengue. Political education was meant to be the finishing school called for by Hirson. The degree to which students accepted the premise that Black Consciousness was incomplete without Marxist-

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245 Gerhart, Gail. 1978. *Black Consciousness: Evolution of an Ideology.* Berkeley: University of California Press. Recent research by Leslie Hadfield charts new ground by extending the scope of black consciousness activities to rural areas, particularly the ideological interchanges that occurred within BC community projects.
Leninist theories of revolution determined the tenor of relations between students and the camp administration.

But ideology only captures a narrow spectrum of relations recorded in the Simons diaries. Jonathan Hyslop provides a wider picture of the resources of revolt during school riots. Hyslop argues that specific acts of student protest must be interpreted in Freudian terms. Power relations within school setting do not permit overt forms of protest, and stifle honest expressions of root grievances. The result is a condensation of meanings around symbolic acts of disobedience. What connects student protests across time and space are repertoires of resistance. Although Hyslop uses the concept of repertoire to draw a conceptual circle around mission school riots in the 1940s and student protests in 1976, another circle certainly encompasses Soweto and the camps. The grievances that animated either setting had nothing in common, but in order to understand the meanings condensed in acts of disobedience, one must look to the repertoire that students carried into the camps. While Afrikaans might have been a convenient rallying point for a set of other grievances that had little to do with the language of instruction, in the camps ideological dissidence might have been signifier for a set of tensions that could not be openly expressed in an environment of ratcheting military discipline born from suspicions of infiltration.\(^{246}\)

As noted previously, Simons wrote two diaries, one from his stay from August 1977 to February 1978, and another from December 1978 to March

1979. The picture captured in the first diary is of an army in flux. Around five
hundred recruits arrived in mid-1977; some from a previous camp in Benguela,
some freshly recruited from South Africa, and others finding their own way into
the exile and the ANC. Simons is disappointed to learn that the ranks of this new
revolutionary army are not working class, they are largely students and the
lumpen-proletariat. This presents two problems. First, students were intellectuals
who could challenge the authority of Marxist-Leninist theory. Second, many
lumpens were under-educated criminals fleeing prosecution, rather than
committed and capable revolutionaries. While reliable students could be placed
in an endless revolving door of instruction at the Party School, irredeemable
criminals and dissidents could neither be expelled nor sent abroad. The result
was a residual population that grew increasingly restive with each passing day.

Theoretical and strategic concerns narrowed this bottleneck. After the
early 1960s exiles lacked an internal constituency within South Africa. Although
a few Robben Islanders left prison in the early 1970s, they hardly comprised a
viable underground that could receive trained cadres. So military strategists
struck a middle path, they formed an elite “Special Operations” unit that
orchestrated spectacular attacks aimed at reigniting popular support, while the
political wing mobilized support among the working class. This twin strategy saw
mass deployment as a distant possibility. In the meantime, only a very small
number of cadres would leave the camps.

Later in the diary Simons notes the disorganization that plagued the early
camps. Military leaders created Novo Catengué as a successor to the Benguela
Camp which was an unmitigated disaster plagued by flies, insufficient supplies, and at least one suicide. Simons also notes that Novo Catengue almost “collapsed” during the first few weeks of operation, and was only saved by the intervention of Cuban administrators. This chronic disorganization points to three related problems. First, the ANC military staff, never known for their organizational efficiency, exhibited insecurity about their ability to restart a stalled armed struggle. Second, this defensiveness plagued fraternal relations between the Cuban reservists who took over the camp administration. The Cubans questioned the decision to favor political mobilization over immediate armed struggle, while the ANC staff felt that their military expertise was not recognized. Third, this souring of relations led to a struggle over authority that affected the coherence and quality of the training program. Should trainees be trained into focoist guerrilla bands, or should they become political educators that might induce class consciousness among the workers? These inconsistencies certainly did not escape the attention of the rank-and-file, many of whom had arrived with belief that they would simply ‘pick up a gun and go home.’ 247

The administration could not openly acknowledge shortcomings in demographics, strategy, and organization. Instead it introduced a vocabulary of infiltration to paper over the difficult questions. The Simons diary clearly records this semantic shift after “Black September.” His account of the investigation into “Black September” showed how this language fused dissidence with subversion and subversion with infiltration. At the same time accusations gain real teeth.

247 Sipho Binda interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/24/93.
Simons’ eyewitness account of this “alleged poisoning” profoundly disrupts the version found in investigative reports. To put it bluntly, Simons remained unconvinced that this was a poisoning, and was also skeptical about the presence of infiltrators. He strongly believed that this was a generic case of food poisoning, and cites several pieces of evident to support his claim. As noted earlier in the diary, camp sanitation was not a priority. Toilets were blocked, there were no pit latrines, and excreta was “all around,” food remains were dumped near the kitchen, flies abounded in the eating hall, and unboiled stream water was used for drinking and washing. Further, the camp had no designated health inspector. This was all contrasted with the Cuban section, which had a separate kitchen, boiled water, and different supplies of food.

Simons description of symptoms and treatment also troubles the accepted version of events. Andrew MASONdo testified to the TRC that the poison used was thallium a highly toxic element readily absorbed after ingestion. But contrary to several investigative, Simons recorded that a fifth of the camp did not fall ill. This included Simons himself, who, as a vegetarian had a special diet. The Cubans also did not suffer from any symptoms. Presuming the poison was placed in food, why did some, but not all, suffer symptoms. Further, not everyone who exhibited symptoms suffered the same degree of illness. Some ended up in triage, while less severe cases awaited later treatment. Perhaps the most curious discrepancy between the Simons diary and accepted accounts regards treatment. Instead of immediately administering antedote by injection,

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Cuban doctors waited four days to administer five injections everyone in the camp. If the poison was as lethal as accepted accounts claim, why did the Cubans wait so long? Further, why would everyone receive the ‘antedote’ regardless of whether they were sickened or not? And why did Cubans administer five injections simultaneously, when the treatment for thallium poisoning, Prussian blue, is administered orally within six hours of ingestion, and followed up by two weeks of daily dosages? Finally, Simons did not record the hair loss or neurological problems that are the lingering effects of thallium poisoning.

There are certainly enough contrary details to question the accepted version of “Black September,” but the real significance of the event lies in the investigation that followed. Simons thought investigators had jumped to conclusions and refused to entertain the possibility that the mass illness had “non-human agency.” Simons wrote that the investigation was a ‘witchhunt’ and much to his chagrin his room was searched, once in his presence, another time when he was not. When Simons went on his daily walk the following afternoon, an armed guard of Cuban soldiers picked him up and returned him to the camp. In this atmosphere, no one was above suspicion, so-called 'dissidents’ and stalwarts alike.

The question remained, was the recoding of indiscipline into subversion a way of disciplining an unruly population, was it a way for rival administrations to monopolize authority, or was a simple matter of security, or a combination of all three possibilities? Simons, never one to shy away from constructive criticism of
the movement, duly noted all of these problems as he recorded incidents of
indiscipline in his diaries. As the “dean” of all political education instructors, he
constantly received reports about class discussions which served as a barometer
of discontent among the rank-and-file. Over time a few instructors singled out a
core of students that they labeled as “dissidents.” Tellingly, the strongest
accusations came from Thami Zulu, then a platoon commander and close
confidant of Simons.

Simons reaction to these accusations is revealing. Throughout the rest of
this diary he never fully accepted the language of subversion, he placed the word
“dissident” in quotations throughout his text. When Zulu singled out one student
in particular, Absalom Mampe, as the ringleader of the dissidents Simons took
the time to hold a discussion class with them. Mampe, a graduate of Turfloop,
asked the most incisive questions about lectures, and expressed a genuine
interest in this critical dialog with Marxist theory. Contrary to reports received
from his instructors, Simons did not find ‘dissidents’ committed to an oppositional
political line, nor was this a group subversives bent on making trouble. Instead
he found the best and brightest of the camp. Why were they labeled as
‘dissidents’? The administration could not publicly admit its impossible situation.
Even though they had capable willing cadres, demographic, strategic, and
organizational problems prevented their rapid deployment. Also, with nowhere to
go, these capable cadres would become compete with instructors for positions
out of the camp. When these cadres realized their predicament, they would start
to ask difficult questions about the progress of the armed struggle and challenge
the authority of instructors. Simons records this with each passing act of
defiance, ending with their total refusal to attend class, march, or sing. This last
episode was deemed insubordination, and the fourteen were then packed off in
the middle of the night to another camp.

The second diary suggests the success of this vocabulary of infiltration.
As Len Smith noted, discipline is often negotiated by officers and enlisted men in
the field.\textsuperscript{249} Looking at Novo Catengue through this lens, the introduction of this
vocabulary shifted the balance of power in debates over the meaning of
discipline, during a time of growing frustration. By the second trip, roughly
August 1978 to March 1979, many of the ‘dissidents’ transferred to other camps,
while Novo Catengue received elite cadres who finished their first round of
specialization in Moscow. Simply put, this was a much different camp than
before, all cadres had taken the MK oath which bound them to the military code
of conduct, and security officials warned the camp on the danger of saboteurs
and agent provocateurs in their midst. The language of infiltration was so firmly
entrenched that Simons noted that he joked about it in his diary, he called lost
mail and power outages acts of sabotage.

Unfortunately Simons did not witness either the aerial bombing or the
investigation that followed. He was evacuated in early March 1979 and only
learned details of the attack from second-hand reports. Investigative reports that
reference this attack hinge on two points, first that intelligence had advance
warning of the aerial bombardment, and thus were able to prevent mass

\textsuperscript{249} Smith, Leonard. 1994. \textit{Between Mutiny and Disobedience: The Case of the French Fifth
casualties and second, that an informant had passed along the routine and layout of the camp. The first point is supported by the diary, although later accounts differ on how the administration knew what they knew about the impending attack, Simons notes that they were hiding in railway culverts several weeks before the actual bombardment. On the second point Simons is silent, but comments on draft version of a his published diary note one salient fact overlooked in all investigative reports; the camp was a former railway barracks adjacent to the highly trafficked Benguela Railroad, the only railway that connected the Zambian Copperbelt to the Atlantic coast. This student noted that cadres used to break the monotony of camp life by “peeping and waving” at people on trains passing by. He regretted this after the bombing since “we made it easier for whoever was reconnoitering.”

Access to the camp was not a problem, and as later writings on Angola attest, Angolans could tell South Africans were foreigners, often dubbing them chiskops after their tell tale shorn scalps. This details alone certainly complicate the notion that information about the whereabouts, layout, and routine of the camp could only come from an infiltrator.

The differences between the Simons diaries and the investigative reports are more than discrepancies between versions of the same narrative, they are


texts of an entirely different order. The genre of investigative reports, with all its similarity to detective novels, not only does not entertain the possibility of non-human agency, its most basic premise totally precludes it. Likewise investigative reports also have to uphold the moral lines of armed struggle, and really cannot accommodate the unacknowledgable problems that plagued not only Novo Catengue, but successor camps as well. But the gap between the two best shows the superimposition of a vocabulary of infiltration over what was a much more complicated set of relations and contingent events. Max Gluckman commented on this very issue in a set of lectures on witchcraft.\footnote{Gluckman, Max. 1956. \textit{Custom and Conflict in Africa}. Oxford: Blackwell. 90-109.}

Turning Pritchard on his head, Gluckman does not seek to find comparable rationalities inscribed in different local logics, he wants to show how both African and Western systems of belief irrationally impose their rationality on situations without causality. Gluckman writes that both systems of belief “cannot accept that social disturbances are an inevitable fact of life,” and instead “ascribe quarrels in society to the vicious characters of certain categories of belief.” Gluckman does not deny the fact that people never “intrigue and damage” but all too often witchhunts persecute category of persons for “ills that are due to physical causes or the working of society itself.” Taking the example of dockworkers, Gluckman suggests that union leaders were all to quick to blame disputes on agitators rather than the “occasional social breakdown.” Rather than accept this, people take the easy route and “blame failures on red-tape civil servants, inefficient executives, counter-revolutionaries, saboteurs, and the like.” Whatever the
circumstances surrounding the alleged poisoning and the aerial bombardment, these events subsume an entire set of complex relations and unacknowledgeable problems into discrete narratives of infiltration.

The publication history of the Simons diaries demonstrates the final act of leverage, forcing the two genealogies together. Almost immediately after the destruction of Novo Catengue, the Communist Party asked Simons to edit his lecture notes into a textbook for the newly built Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College. This project stalled until, 1984 when the Politburo tasked Marion Sparg with assisting the editing this textbook into a primer for the underground. In 1986, Sparg was captured on a mission and the manuscript languished until the early 1990s until project again got off the ground, this time under a new editor who collected oral histories with former instructors and students at Novo Catengue. This version also added selections from Simons second diary, and posed the book now as both a textbook, a history of Novo Catengue, and a testament to a trusted stalwart. Once again Simons dropped the project citing sensitivities over the integration of his former students in the new SANDF, but these former students later endorsed the publication of what had become both a tribute to their former teacher and their own liberation credentials. Completion of this tribute became ever more pressing after Simons’ death in 1995. In the late 1990s, three Party members collected more oral histories, finalized the draft, and posthumously published the edited volume under the title *Comrade Jack: The Political Lectures and Diary of Jack Simons, Novo Catengue.*

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The long and convoluted publication history of *Comrade Jack* is significant because it details the process of turning a chronicle of an unruly camp into a set piece of struggle history. The function of the text is both memorial and didactic, it celebrates the accomplishments of a great struggle hero, while preserving his teachings for future generations. In this, diary excerpts appear as documentary truth; they are evidence of the success of his program, as well as the dangers posed by the aerial bombardment. In this sense, *Comrade Jack* is another in a long line other celebratory volumes, and fits within the overall narrative arc that guided the ANC Submission to the TRC. Although these are vastly different texts, the editors preface *Comrade Jack* with certain familiar heroic themes and moral coordinates. Given this compatibility, it comes as little surprise then, that the book bears two forwards, one by Oliver Tambo, the deceased president of the ANC-in-exile, and Kgalema Motlanthe then secretary general of the ANC, and later the interim president of South Africa. This is, then, a text doubly stamped with official authorization.

The question for the editors must have been how do you maintain the status of this text as struggle history while preserving its authority as documentary truth? First and foremost the excerpts included consist of most of the second diary. The only sections excised are notes from an executive meeting which detailed squabbles between the South African Communist Party and the ANC and the political and military wings of the exile apparatus. This

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exclusion certainly tidies up the narrative but could reasonably fall under edits done for the sake of brevity.

The heavy hand of officialdom falls most conspicuously on a more significant omission. Although editors acknowledge that Simons kept two diaries, they also claim that they found only the second diary, and entirely exclude the first diary from their final draft. Unlike the second diary, the first diary gave a detailed picture of the dilemmas faced by the administration, and their imposition of the language of infiltration over legitimate grievances. The exclusion of the first diary also excludes alternate interpretations of the alleged poisoning, records the removal of ‘dissidents,’ not to mention salacious details like an attempted rape committed by the Cubans and a subsequent retaliation by the rank-and-file.

The status of the first diary at the time of publication is unclear. It is possible that they had the first diary and deliberately omitted it, they were genuinely unable to locate it, or that Simons withheld the diary. Whatever the case may be, the absence of this text from a key severely limits public knowledge of Novo Catengué and preserves the integrity of official explanations of “Black September” and the aerial bombardment. In effect, this volume is an example of one genealogy grafted onto another. Since readers can only access the second diary, which shows more placid camp, they lose the complexity of the first diary, for the ‘useful history’ of the investigative report. The meaning of Novo Catengué, remains undisturbed, it was a promising camp ruined by the two most lethal atrocities that never happened. Further, the lesson to be taken from this

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254 The entire set of known diaries can be found in the same boxfile in the Simons Collection in the Manuscripts and Archives Department at the University of Cape Town.
story is that the means of investigation, even when practiced in excess, were both necessary and good because they clearly saved innocent lives. In this, Comrade Jack and the First and Second Submission share a common trait. As private texts move closer to publication they are shorn of all the thorny details that might trouble the overarching narrative of the liberation struggle and the armed struggle within it. This clipping of genealogies is but one example of the policing of public knowledge of this history.
CHAPTER FIVE
EVERYDAY LIFE DURING WARTIME: EXPERIENCE, MODES OF WRITING, AND THE UNDERGROUND IN CAPE TOWN DURING THE LONG DECADE OF THE 1980S

Gilles Perrault’s *The Red Orchestra* opens with a fictional account of the search for a secret radio transmitter in Norway operated by *die Rote Kapelle*, the German name for an extensive network of communist spies that ‘performed’ throughout Nazi-occupied Europe during the first years of the Second World War.255 As Perrault narrates his highly imaginative account of the episode, he sketches the character of the Wehrmacht radio operator searching the ether, describes his consternation over a storm brewing over the grey Baltic, notes the migration of gulls overhead, and ends with the resignation of a man aware of, but ultimately frustrated by, the invisibility of his foes. Perrault spends the next few paragraphs telling his audience how he made the entire passage up, albeit anchoring his fictional flourishes with the known facts of the Norwegian transmitter and those hunting for it. He then lays out before his readers the thin, lifeless litany of uncontested details about Nazi radio monitoring and the operation of this particular ‘soloist’ in the orchestra performing for an audience in Moscow. These details, while truthful, clearly lack the novelistic beauty of the preceding more literate account, which is drenched with experience, psychology and drama. The juxtaposition of both modes of writing is stark, polemic, and deliberate.

*The Red Orchestra* is relevant here because it was a book that was read in the ANC underground in Cape Town in the 1980s. But more importantly it is a

book that speaks to broader historiographical problems with the writing and revision of the historiography on “resistances” everywhere, the entire anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, and the ANC underground within it. Perrault’s point in contrasting these of modes of writing history is two fold. His account makes claims to historical truth, and peels away epistemological curtains with “thick descriptions” of interviews and interviewees, but he also entreats his readers to allow him to tell a compelling, yet novelized story—a narrative arc which he imaginatively sketched at the end of his litany of bare facts; “these quiet beginnings heralded a campaign which was to become a nightmare to... the heads of Germany’s two secret services, and which eventually prompted Adolf Hitler to declare, on May 17th, 1942, ‘The Bolsheviks are our superiors in only one field—espionage.’”256

With his conclusion in his preamble, Perrault infers that writing in an imaginative mode, rather than in a strictly factual mode, will give his readers access to authentic historical experiences of an underground that was almost invisible to its adversaries, and became somewhat more opaque in subsequent postwar historiography on resistances in Europe. The poetic way he constructs his narrative of the interview process and the narratives contained in oral testimonies end up as a celebration of the secret work of a spy network that he infers was either maligned, marginalized, or wholly unrecognized after the war. With poetic license in hand, he transformed the ambiguous legacy of the fallen leader of a broken spy ring, into a heroic narrative of defiance and skill, and thus

saves the memory of die Rote Kapelle from being plowed under in a highly contentious historiography on “resistances,” or a singular notion of “The Resistance” in Europe.\textsuperscript{257} Simply put, the very publication of The Red Orchestra is one grand historiographical rescue attempt, albeit one that rescues its subjects not from physical danger but from obscurity itself. Perrault’s broader purpose is not only in lionizing this conductor and his players, but in breaking them into the pantheon of European resistance fighters by using a key fashioned with particular modes of writing.

The Red Orchestra presents too many theoretical issues on the historiography of other resistances to unpack in a single chapter. In terms of the history of the underground in South Africa in the 1980s, Perrault’s method of framing his work on die Rote Kapelle provides historians with a useful way to think about the ongoing conceptual crisis in this literature. The Red Orchestra is instructive not only because historical writing on resistance to Nazi-occupation in Europe captured the imaginations of many anti-apartheid activists in Cape Town, or this book occupied a central part of the syllabus of at least one underground unit operating in city in the early to mid-1980s. The Red Orchestra outlines the central problem of writing about the 1980s, the entire history of resistance in

\textsuperscript{257} Leopold Trepper had one of those larger than life 20\textsuperscript{th} century biographies that is too complex to adequately describe in a footnote. The incredible circumstances of his upbringing, his capture, his possible cooperation with captors, his imprisonment in the Soviet Union and his flight to Israel are just a few examples of this larger than life quality. Given all these convolutions, Trepper’s memory within anti-Fascist resistance historiography is unstable at best, untenable at worst. The Red Orchestra can profitably be thought of as a five hundred page defense of Trepper’s honor and integrity. Whether it convinces skeptical readers and those active in the resistance is an entirely different story.
South Africa, and the place of the armed struggle within this narrative. That problem is that few have found a way to get past explaining the history of the ANC underground without making claims about the end of apartheid, and, in turn, avoid conflating the history of the underground with the history of the struggle. The vast body of claims and counter-claims made in this ever-expanding literature, are all part of one elaborate exercise in valorizing experience. But few explanations of ‘the end of apartheid’ have taken the underground in the 1980s on its own terms. In this regard, *The Red Orchestra* is instructive because points to an unresolved dilemma in resistance historiography, how is the turn to experience justified in particular modes of writing?

This chapter is a review of the literature on the underground in the 1980s and a microhistory of distinct groups of combatants working in Cape Town at three specific historical junctures. This localized history complicates prior generalizations about organizational politics and political orientation, and troubles any notions of a singular experience of the underground. An examination of these experiences divorced from claim-making about particular modes of writing, and the post-apartheid positioning that these claims entail, tells a much more intimate story. In this review of my material, I answer two sets of questions. First how do we write a history of experience that doesn’t confuse the orchestra for the players? In other words how do we write a history of experience that does not foreground organization over experience. And what can an alternative history of

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experience thus conceived tell us about the intellectual worlds evident in the everyday lives of the ‘invisible’ underground units in Cape Town?

Perrault’s book is merely one useful example of a dilemma that crosses disciplines, geographies, and theoretical concerns. The vast literature on this dilemma circles around a series of important questions about the status of oral testimony and written evidence—in this case testimony and evidence drawn from the underground in the Western Cape in the 1980s. Are the established modes of writing—namely social histories, ‘struggle histories,’ and apartheid apologias—the best way to arrange the rich hues of experience captured in the oral archive? Can you reach a definitive answer about the relationship of the underground and the armed struggle to the struggle with such an incomplete written record? Does all evidence need to be framed within an interpretative narrative invested in claims of causality in the “the end of apartheid,” and thus the legitimacy of the post-apartheid state? Conversely, is it enough to let the evidence ‘speak for itself’ or is it better to allow competing claims about particular modes of writing, resistance and armed struggle made by veterans and scholars wrestle with each other? Perrault took the literary route to bind heroic narratives of experience to explanations of particular modes of writing. Should historians of South Africa adopt a similar mode of writing for the material on the underground in Cape Town in the 1980s?

Because locality and time are critically important in understanding experience, this chapter is bounded geographically and chronologically. Following Vivian Bickford-Smith’s injunction to appreciate all the regionally
contingent ways segregation manifested itself, I argue, following many others, that the only way to make sense of “the struggle,” is to look at it at one region at a time, since the dismantling of localized forms of segregation was equally replete with local specificities of resistance.259 Like previous chapters, I draw from Cape Town and the Western Cape, and, when necessary, from other cities and regions. I made contact with members of four or possibly five cells that operated in the ANC underground in the Western Cape during the 1970s and 1980s. A majority of these interviewees were formally inducted into MK, and a majority of these interviewees operated in Cape Town. What follows is a meditation on modes of writing based on oral and written evidence taken from these underground structures during the second phase of the armed struggle, roughly from 1976 to 1993.

As noted in chapter one, and elaborated at great length by Bickford-Smith, the historical specificities and state social engineering of the Western Cape distorted more typical social and demographic processes witnessed in other urban areas in South Africa during the period of ‘informal’ segregation and apartheid. Economically, socially, and politically the Cape was and is unique within South Africa, although not so on the rest of the continent.260 As oral and written evidence will show, the material on the underground in Cape Town is


260One could make a reasonable argument that most port cities in Africa, particularly port cities on the Atlantic shared some basic similarities in economic, social and political trajectories. In terms of the liberation movements in southern Africa, the obvious case of Luanda comes to mind.
alternately unique, familiar, and general. And sometimes it is all of these things at
the same time.

Accordingly, I present experiences that may or may not align with the
experience of the underground in other regions. The idea that one experience
drawn from one locality at one moment, trumps another from a different person,
place and time is patently absurd, but many ‘struggle historians’ and social
historians often make these sorts of claims. In any case, I make no claim to
‘representativity’ whatever that might mean in the context of oral testimony and
written documents drawn from network of groups in one locality at several
different moments.

The conclusion I posit is that particular modes of writing, namely social
histories, ‘struggle histories’ and apartheid apologias, are all locked in parlor
game of a particular kind of truth-telling, and representations of experience are
the cards played in these sort of contests. This trivialization of complex oral and
written evidence hinders the future development of historiography on the 1980s
in South Africa.

Arguably, most social histories of the struggle build upon Marxian social
histories written in the 1970s. The pioneering work of Marxian social historians
took experience seriously, but their conceptual basis was based on claim-making
about abstract social processes and their analytical eye was always fixed on the
macro-historical level. Such claims based on experience bore much fruit over
the next few decades, but not without critique. The most incisive critique came in
a 1993 review article by Frederick Cooper.\textsuperscript{261} Cooper’s point is that resistance—narrowly conceived as indirect and direct rejection of the power of mine bosses, farmers, factory owners, and ship captains—tends to flatten experience into one dimensional confrontations, and neatly tucks away loose ends, missed opportunities and alternative options. Perhaps most damingly, this mode of writing misses all of the other ways people conceived of their worlds, aside from their subtle and not so subtle protests against wretched socio-economic conditions.

My purpose is not to link experience of the underground to grand historical narratives about social change in South Africa, nor is it to prop up the sagging legitimacy of the post-apartheid state, and I will certainly not write an apologia for apartheid. To be sure, I locate my subjects within the broader social and racial milieu of Cape Town and the Western Cape, and I do not deny the existence of vicious forms of racial and class oppression. But unlike other studies I take experience as a way of illuminating several individuals’ understandings and thoughts about the conflict they were in. So this chapter is not referring either to the lower case “r” or capital case “R” forms of Marxian concepts of resistance referred to in Cooper’s critique.\textsuperscript{262} This chapter is not an elaboration or rejection of the important work of Marxian scholars concerned with mines, farms, factories and ships. Social history and ‘struggle histories’ aside, I have stronger critiques of apartheid apologias, but those are reserved for another venue.


So my quarry is decidedly different from that of 1970s-era social history, and its 1980s-era descendants. My use of the term ‘resistance’ refers to what was known in European languages as ‘The Resistance’, and later glossed in South Africa, as the combination of its overt and covert forms; or “the underground” and “the aboveground.” “The Resistance” in Europe is also a term in dire need of retooling and specificity, but generally glosses as formal structures and organizations that played an active role in strategizing, theorizing, frustrating, or confronting an illegitimate regime or foreign occupation. In my mind, the historiography on “The Resistance” in Europe, rather than the Marxian literature on practices of “resistance” by the working class, provides the most fruitful points of comparison for understanding ‘everyday life’ during wartime.263

As noted above, South Africans read about mid-20th century Europe, fantasized about the possibilities of “The Resistance” to their own struggles, and to some degree refashioned themselves after these partisans and patriots. This history of experience is more about breaking the social and political mise-en-scene through secrecy and illegality, than it is about the practice of secretly breaking tools.

A definition of periodization and terminology precedes any discussion of the complex historiography on the underground in the 1980s. In temporal terms, the 1980s should be thought of as a long decade whose timeline begins somewhere in the restive early to mid-1970s, and perhaps bled into the violent early years of the 1990s. This not-so-unique periodization is already tacitly accepted in much

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of literature, although scholars argue over precise years for very interesting reasons. The underground resistance and counterinsurgency/repression comprises the activities of all disparate parties involved in the strategization, planning, and command and control of political violence perpetrated with the declared intent of bringing about the end of apartheid or the defense of the existing social order, however these ends were disparately conceived and disingenuously effected. In terms of the armed struggle, this could be formal exile armies infiltrating cadres into underground cells, less formal groups formed sui generis within the country, or so-called ‘spontaneous’ violence often provoked during public demonstrations, forced removals, or retaliations against collaborators or insurgents both real and imagined.

The underground is a more nebulous term. At its most basic level it is the subterranean architecture of formal hierarchies, informal networks, and personal relationships that underlies more obvious forms of oppositional protest. The dichotomies most often used to delineate this nebulous term are the following: the underground versus the aboveground, the armed versus the unarmed, the military versus the political, the vanguard versus the masses, legal versus illegal, the visible versus the invisible, the obvious versus the secret, and the overt versus the covert. In various ways others have commented on how all of

264 The term most often used by my interviewees to distinguish between armed and unarmed comrades, particularly my interviewees operating in the above ground structures of the UDF, was ‘carrying the gun’. If one was known as ‘carrying the gun’ then it marked you as a literal combatant, and in most instances a fully oathed and trained member of MK. In practice there was a good degree of operational overlap between the two, as UDF ‘aboveground’ activists were sometimes asked to house cadres and weapons in their homes, or were wittingly or unwittingly transporting weapons across borders and through the country. Still, these individuals are today, as yesterday, very, very vigilant about claiming the status inferred by the phrase ‘carrying the gun’.
these dichotomies break down under the weight of this complex oral and written evidence. Parts of this rubric holds up better than others, but a good definition of what is and what is not the underground, and how the underground relates to the broad field of struggle historiography awaits more careful theorization of this evidence. 265

For the intents and purposes here, I simply apply the label underground to whatever my interviewees say is underground, and pay close attention to formal affiliations, initiations, oathing, and practices.266 This passive definition runs certain factual risks, but it was very difficult for an interviewer to determine the precise affiliation of many interviewees.267 Likewise, the level of secrecy afforded to documents, and the patterns of their circulation at the date of ‘publication,’ is only a rough indicator of whether a certain document came from the underground or not. These operative terms guide my review of the historiography on the ‘experience’ of underground, particular modes of writing in the historiography of Cape Town in the 1980s, which review precedes my own reading of localized oral and written evidence both new and old.

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265 The gargantuan task of sifting through the dozens of struggle biographies now on offer awaits another intrepid doctoral student. In addition to this we have the broad array of books that derive their theoretical basis from social science literature on social movements. Finally there are the fictional and semi-fictional accounts of the underground which overlap with this chapter but are too numerous to exhaustively address here.

266 My interviewees expressed their self-identifications with deadly seriousness, an indicator of the rigidly segmented power of claim-making in remembrances of the armed struggle the post-apartheid present. For example, countless interviewees began their interview by carefully pointing out that they were or were not formally in MK. Claiming historical membership meant the power to activate certain claims in the present, as well as conveying a set of assumptions about the limits of their perspective on the past.

267 This has a lot to do with post-apartheid monumentalization, the monument-industrial complex, and lingering fears of prosecution for human rights violations. None of the interviewees here had these reservations.
Experience and Modes of Writing

The best place to address issues of experience and the underground is a review of dissertations submitted in the last ten years. This past ten years have been boom years for scholarship on the underground, and judging by the titles and content of these specific dissertations there is a pressing need to move beyond the political and social histories that predominated in the 1990s. The three dissertations under review here are Rachidi Molapo’s “Aspects of the South African Youth Experiences in Exile, 1960-1994”, Raymond Suttner’s “Rendering Visible; The Organizational Experience of the ANC-led Alliance Until 1976”, and Lynda von den Steinen’s “Experiencing the Armed Struggle; The Soweto Generation and After”. Molapo, Suttner and von den Steinen examine different subjects—youths in exile, the underground, and MK and APLA in toto—but all of these subjects find some degree of overlap in the underground.

These three recent dissertations on the armed struggle collectively argue that there is an ‘organizational experience’ that can be explained through careful

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synthesis of primarily oral evidence. Although their rationales for moving into the experiential realm vary slightly, all three note the paucity of the written record, argue for an acceptable evidentiary bias toward oral sources, which they then claim are the locus of authentic and verifiable ‘experience.’ All three share a positivist orientation toward oral history, namely that with time and openness previously silent struggle veterans may open up, allowing for a ‘now-it-can-be-told’ oral record. Further, they suggest that corroborating ‘scarce’ written record with authenticated oral testimonies, and unauthenticated oral testimonies with authenticated oral histories, the opening and growth of archival collections in recent years will yield a revised, full, and accurate picture of the recent past.

These evidentiary claims are born of dissatisfaction with the top-down organizational histories that preceded this scholarship. Much of their dissatisfaction stems from the two most significant organizational histories on these topics; The UDF by Jeremy Seekings and Conscripts to Their Age by Howard Barrell. Both of these pioneering organizational histories of the UDF and MK, while scrupulously factual, exhaustively researched, and absolutely seminal, lack the human dimension promised in histories ‘told from below.’ So the turn to ‘experience’ in all these dissertations are justified in the same vein as E.P. Thompson’s oft quoted call to rescue the “poor stockinger” and the “obsolete hand-loom weaver…from the enormous condescension of posterity”. The only difference between these historiographical rescue attempts, and Thompson’s

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270 Both of these authors fully acknowledge this implicitly or explicitly in their texts. I suspect that the moment when they conducted their research and writing limited their analysis to organizational topics.

work on the early working class in Britain, is that histories of exiles, the underground, and the armed struggle are linked to a vast claim-making complex enmeshed in contemporary post-apartheid state legitimacy. In many ways rescuing the ordinary youth, operative, or cadre from the “condescension of posterity” is simultaneously about breaking them into the pantheon of more elite struggle heroes—a pantheon conceived, built, and beholden to the post-apartheid state. In short, this ‘temple to the heroes of the struggle’ occupies center of the claim-making complex that maintains the legitimacy of the post-apartheid state.

The degree to which each of these scholars meet this problem head on, acknowledge their role within or without this claim-making complex, and problematize experience and its relationship to particular modes of writing, largely determines the success of their research agenda.272

In this regard, the conspicuous deployment of the term ‘experience’ is telling. Each of these recent dissertations uses the term ‘experience’ in their titles. But what precisely does ‘experience’ actually mean? Molapo does not directly define the term. The closest he comes in the introduction is the “lives and situations of South African exiles…”273 Perhaps this is a history of experience based on biography? If so, then where is the requisite problematizing

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272 Von den Steinen and Suttner are more explicit about the consequences of this rescue attempt and installation within the pantheon.

of struggle biography addressed by Suttner and von den Steinen and others? Suttner avoids the evidentiary pitfalls of struggle biographies altogether, but also neglects to define his usage of ‘experience’ in any explicit way. Instead, he adds a modifier to the term, calling his work a history of the ‘organizational experience’ of the underground, in which the ‘organization’ looms large over three fields that he argues comprises experience: gender relations, romantic love, and the sacrifice of the personal for the political. Von den Steinen follows a similar schema in her review of the armed struggle, but changes the organizational locus of her study from the underground to liberation armies, particularly both MK and APLA. All three studies justify their turn to experiential history as more a neglected addendum to the grand narrative of the struggle and less as a conceptual corrective to a struggle literature gone awry. Von den Steinen explains that the recent turn to experience, however ill-defined, is nonetheless justified because ‘ordinary soldiers deserve their place in history as well.’

The inclusion of the ‘ordinary soldier’ is necessary, good, and overdue but none of these scholars question just what sort of ‘history’ they might be placing their ‘ordinary soldiers’ into. Even though these authors might be loath to admit this, they are writing ‘struggle histories’ masquerading as social histories. And ‘struggle history,’ with its subsets of exile, popular protest, organized protest,

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275 Suttner’s revision of struggle history is probably the exception here. His claim that the underground survived after Rivonia, and formed the basis for regeneration in the 1980s.

underground protest, and the armed struggle in toto, suffers from a severe case of whiggishness. Coined in The Whig Interpretation of History in 1931, Herbert Butterfield used the term whiggishness to describe the historiography on the Whig Party in Great Britain.\(^{277}\) The term as since taken on a life of its own, so it is important to briefly return to the definition that Butterfield laid out in 1931. Butterfield made three claims, first that 19th century whig historians failed to appreciate the ‘unlikenesses between the past and present, likewise failed to place ‘individuals and parties in their proper context’ and were thus ‘prone to base the story upon a single person or party, rather than explore the complexities of the entire historical process’.\(^{278}\) Two consequences flow from these problems; the complexity of the historical process is flattened into a morality play between ‘heroes’ and ‘villains,’ second there is a “persistant confusion of the outcomes of actions for the intentions of the actors”.\(^{279}\) A history preoccupied with personality, progress, and particular modes of writing, could not admit the full complexity of ‘the historical process.’\(^{280}\) Butterfield claimed that the way out of this dilemma was a return to rigorous ‘methodological particularity’ that would

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end the ‘abridgement’ of history and arrive at the proper contextualization of the past.

Butterfield rightfully critiqued over-determined historical narratives, but the solution he offered had its own problems. As Sewel notes, Butterfield merely replaced the idolatry of progress with the idolatry of process. E.H. Carr noted similar problems, suggesting that Butterfield’s renewed call for empiricism came dangerously close to Ranke’s theoretically agnostic call to describe the past “wie es eigentlich gewesen ist.”[281] Although experience was clearly not on Butterfield’s agenda, others later suggested that an experiential dimension could occupy the vacuum left by the demolition of “whiggish history.” Experience can satisfy the call to particularism, and the a rigorous reading of sources that particularism entails. But what can experience deliver that whiggish history cannot? Further, how can experience rescue exiled youths, the underground, and the comrade from the condescension of posterity, without adding them to the ‘pantheon of struggle heroes’?

As witnessed in previous chapters, I follow the definitions of experience deployed in micro-history. Carlo Ginsburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms* is instructive in this regard. Ginsburg’s trouble with social history is not in its ability to local individuals within a class-based schema or to give voice to ‘ordinary people’ or the idea of class conflict itself. What he seems to be doing with ‘experience’ is problematizing the social historian’s obsession with particular modes of writing. This hardly a retreat into an apolitical netherworld of anecdotes.

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and obscurantism. Rather he is making a very political claim that the intellectual lives of individuals matter, that they can be recovered through a dialogue with evidence, and that social historians, and in this case ‘struggle historians,’ have been derelict in their duty to bring these experiences to the surface of their grand theories of social change.282

In The Cheese and the Worms, Ginsburg challenges social historians to see the broader implications of the peculiar Weltanschauung of one 16th century miller as a lens into the largely invisible dynamics of popular culture. In this way Menocchio’s peculiarity, and unique, uncorroborated, and perhaps “unrepresentative” testimony, opens a window into the intellectual lives of peasants, a world overlooked by others devoted to constructing a quantifiable, verifiable, and generalized body of evidence. On an evidentiary plane, Ginzburg restores some balance between the validity of oral and written evidence. Most of his evidence is oral testimony given by Menocchio, albeit compelled by Church authorities during heresy trial. But Ginsburg follows he is primarily concerned with Mennochio’s reading and interpretation of texts. His subtle treatment of the interplay between Menocchio’s readings of texts, explanations of the historical status of the texts he read, and the intellectual improvisations Menocchio derived from these interpretations, deeply upset the underlying political and scholarly agenda of social history as practiced in the mid-1970s. Experience, then, is not only the lived conditions of forgotten people, but also how they interpreted these

conditions as mediated through their engagement with a world of ideas. In this regard, Ginzburg argues that social historians, even those who use experience to explain lived conditions, have missed the forest for the trees.

With this definition of experience in mind, I have three counter claims to make in regards to recent scholarship on experience, whiggish 'struggle histories,' and social history. First, in much of this literature there are implicit demotions of the written word vis-à-vis the spoken word and explicit complaints about the paucity of documents. Neither of these contentions are true. The written record of the struggle, while fragmentary, policed, and encoded is not any more or any less incomplete than the oral record. Nor are these documents as scarce as many assume. The problem is not in the quantity or quality of written evidence vis-à-vis oral testimony, but in the conceptual tools brought to bear upon both bodies. Second, Molapo, Suttner, and von den Steinen, lay out three rather contentious claims; first, reading oral testimony in isolation from this written evidence, second, assuming that oral testimony presents a more accurate and authentic of rank-and-file experience, and third, the possibility of validating and corroborating ‘representative’ testimonies from ‘unrepresentative’ testimonies, all miss the important historiographical points made by Ginzburg. Oral testimony is not the sole font of truth, and neither is the written record. Even when read in conversation with each other, the written and the oral do not comprise two halves which fit together constitute truthful whole; social, political or

283 After 12 months of full time research I returned from South Africa with seven thousand pages of documents derived from four official archives and at least seven personal archives. Quite frankly, this is more written material than I could synthesize in a lifetime.
otherwise. Understanding the gaps between the oral and written record addresses many of the problems Perrault noted in *die Rote Kappelle*, Ginzburg confirmed in Menocchio, and what I will attempt to prove in my reading of evidence of the underground in Cape Town during the long decade of the 1980s.

**The Forensic Archive: Dimensions of Resistance and Repression in Cape Town**

Following all this, I argue that historiographical claims and counter claims made in the published literature on organizational and political history and unpublished dissertations on experience lacks a sustained engagement with the words and evidence of one localized set of combatants. In other words, the reliance on an ill-defined experience and the assignment of particular modes of writing that this reliance entails, are too mired in contemporary politics of representation, and the politics of post-transition careerism to take seriously the written and spoken words of combatants themselves. This problem became most apparent after my interviews with individuals who participated in underground structures in Cape Town. When held against the explanations offered by commentators over the last three decades, these testimonies reveal entire worlds of experience, rendered in readings, improvisations, and performances of texts. All these facets of experience are captured in oral testimony and many of the original texts read at the time survived the ‘secret’ war waged in South Africa. In a case of the snake swallowing its evidentiary tail, the reading of texts and the improvisations and performances derived from their interpretations, are further debated and critiqued in oral testimony. This folding and refolding of comments and dialogue and reading and writing is utterly
missing from social history that concerned with locating the bedrock of social truth in experience, and in the statist cottage industry of ‘struggle histories,’ and plausibly deniable apartheid apologias.

Madeleine Fullard’s *The State and Political Struggle* in Cape Town, is a useful starting point for reconsidering concepts of everyday life and experience in the underground in Cape Town. Fullard’s study is not a ‘struggle history’ or a social history and it certainly is not an apologia for apartheid. Instead, her work is part of a separate genealogy of fact-finding and truth-telling that began with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and continues into the present day. Her reconstruction of the political landscape of Cape Town in the 1980s is a means of accounting for deaths caused by resistance and repression. Although she meticulously names individual casualties, testimony is not in the foreground of her analysis. Consequently her concern is less with excavating hidden social truths through explanations of lived experience rendered in oral testimony, and more with measuring the dimensions, quantity and quality of state and anti-state violence practiced in one specific locality. Freed from the sort of claim-making implicit in the genealogies of social history, ‘struggle history’, and apartheid apologias, this work does two things that other modes of writing do not. First, it conceptualizes different political constituencies without making claims to their legitimacy or illegitimacy. Secondly, it deploys a very different chronology to explain the violence practiced by these political constituencies. What emerges is a broad tableau of violence in Cape Town in the 1980s, an engaged but
dispassionate consideration of its consequences, and, as I argue, a useful frame for re-evaluating the concept of everyday life in the underground.

Fullard begins her narrative with a detailed reconstruction of the state security apparatus that operated through the 1980s, follows that with a description of the three 'sites of resistance' and then draws conclusions based on her analysis of the deaths caused by repression and resistance. Although she draws heavily from testimony presented during various commissions and public inquiries, her primary concern is with tallying the numbers of deaths and assigning specific deaths to different categories of political violence. In this regard, her inquiry into the ‘forensic archive’ provides a useful backdrop for evaluating the perceptions of repression and resistance in the underground.

Fullard places a detailed description of the evolution of state security ahead of her narrative on resistance politics. She recapitulates evidence collected during the Harms Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but focuses on the deployment of these structures and strategies in Cape Town. Understanding the deployment of the security state at the local level is critical, not only because it predated transformations in resistance groups, but because it shaped the operational space inhabited by resistance groups. In addition, the specificities of state counterinsurgency strategies created gaps between general Soviet doctrines on how to conduct ‘underground work.’ Underground cadres saw these gaps, and attempted to inform their practice with readings of Soviet texts on underground work. If the Soviet texts failed to satisfy their needs, they turned to a bricolage of other texts. When Soviet doctrine and alternative texts
failed to fit the situation they saw on the ground, state counterinsurgency strategies formed much of the context of underground improvisations.

The apartheid state shifted its approach to public order and public relations after failing to anticipate the scope and intensity of violence witnessed during the Soweto Uprising. Almost immediately, military and intelligence officials began to characterize domestic unrest as a manifestation of “Total Onslaught,” a vast conspiracy orchestrated by communist-backed exiles, whose ultimate objective was the armed overthrow of the state after a popular insurrection.\textsuperscript{284} The state crafted “Total Strategy” in response; a two pronged plan that eliminated the threat posed by exiles by destabilizing hostile neighboring states, while undermining mass protest and armed activity within South Africa through targeted violence and the cultivation a moderate black constituency. “Total Strategy” borrowed heavily from classic counterinsurgency doctrines deployed in conflicts in Malaya, Vietnam, Rhodesia and Namibia. Foremost among these adapted theories was John McCuen’s concept of ‘winning hearts and minds’ known also by the eponymous acronym “WHAM.” The central tenet of WHAM is that insurgencies cannot be defeated by conventional warfare alone, but must consist of a coordinated program composed of 80% welfare and 20% warfare. Translated into the South African situation, welfare was adapted to court

\textsuperscript{284} Documents on the ‘official mind’ of apartheid security establishment are scarce, and biographies of top officials are cryptic on decision making during this time period. Likewise it is unclear whether ‘Total Strategy’ was believed in good faith, or a useful foil for constructing personal fiefdoms for ranking intelligence officials and SADF generals. Based on my reading of the evidence on espionage within the ANC, and the tactical manual referred to below, I can cautiously argue that by 1985 the security establishment knew the strengths and weaknesses of the exile apparatus and the underground, and knew it probably did not constitute a mortal threat to the regime. This realization must form part of the rationale for the turn to negotiations.
‘moderate’ middle-class black Africans, Coloureds and Indians through an array of political reforms, legal concessions, and economic incentives. According to McCuen, the ‘silent majority’ of a populace could be swayed by limiting popular grievances, providing a viable alternative to the revolutionary project, and delegitimizing insurgent propaganda. Examples of this strategy included the expansion of local government in the townships in 1982, the Tricameral elections held in 1984, and the razing and rebuilding of Crossroads in 1986/87. While never truly successful, the government never gave up on this prong of ‘Total Strategy’ and consistently introduced a range of largely unconvincing welfare efforts throughout the entire decade.

Learning the lessons of the Soweto debacle, the warfare component of ‘Total Strategy,’ was designed to avoid public displays of violence committed by recognizable state agents. Above all else counterinsurgency warfare should be inconspicuous, discriminate, and plausibly deniable. By 1979, security forces executed dozens of operations through a nation-wide hierarchy of joint commands which coordinated the police, the military, intelligence services, black proxies and white auxiliaries. This highly integrated structure was collectively known as the National Security Management System (NSMS). By the mid-1980s the NSMS had become a shadow state led by ‘securocrats’ who commanded vast budgets and seemed to supercede civilian rule. As in welfare efforts, intentions did not match outcomes, and an ostensibly silent war often devolved into very public displays of low intensity conflict. In spite of these lapses, the government’s repression of the 1984/1985 unrest, while bloody and mostly
visible, saw far fewer deaths than the repression that followed the Soweto Uprising.\textsuperscript{285}

Having sketched the development and implementation of state repression, Fullard then turns to resistance to state authority. Addressing a question asked by so many others, but as yet unsatisfactorily answered, Fullard attempts to map a decade when resistance came from many quarters and use this topography to explain the consequences of each form of protest. To make sense of this complex terrain, she divides the broad and varied forms of resistance into three categories, or ‘sites of struggle.’ The first category, popular protest, was comprised of sort of ad-hoc, spontaneous, and largely unorganized contestations of state power. This form of protest could be passive evasions of pass laws or more violent forms of confrontations such as attacking agents of the state with homemade weapons. The second category, organized protest, was composed of the “campaigns and protests organized by activists and supporters of the liberation movements through their organized formations such as the UDF and its affiliates”.\textsuperscript{286} This form of protest included strikes, boycotts and demonstrations, and shared the common characteristic of public displays of mass strength. The third category, underground protest, includes the armed formations of exiled liberation movements. This form of protest is by definition planned in secret and included “attacks on property and persons” involving the use of ‘formal weaponry


such as firearms and explosives."\textsuperscript{287} Underground protest was generally geared toward ‘armed propaganda,’ highly visible spectacles of violence that demonstrated the destructive capacity of underground units.\textsuperscript{288} But underground protest also had more prosaic functions such as political education and the quiet operations such as the assassination of traitors, rivals and uniformed and un-uniformed agents of the state.\textsuperscript{289} She argues against seeing these ‘sites of resistance’ in isolation from each other, but rather considers these sites to be guideposts for her chronology of protest, which is the centerpiece of her study.

Fullard then presents an overlapping chronology of confrontations between the repressive apparatus of the state and these three sites of struggle. She implicitly and explicitly identifies three periods of resistance. The first period, roughly from 1976 to 1983, saw the repression of student organizations after Soweto, the beginning of a new phase of ‘armed propaganda’ and the return of student activism during the school boycotts of 1980. The launch of the UDF in


\textsuperscript{288} The epiphenomenality of ‘armed propaganda’ is often explained by former underground cadres as a way of conscientizing and mobilizing the masses. Whether ‘armed propaganda actually accomplished this goal, or remained ‘a thing that went bump in the night’ is a question of continual debate.

\textsuperscript{289} An oft rumored but thinly substantiated claim is that one other secret component of underground protest was what I would term ‘creative fundraising.’ Several authors make the claim that high ranking exiles ran stolen car rackets, smuggled diamonds, and were the premier traffickers of Mandrax in Lusaka. These activities, while anecdotal at this point, appear on the margins of testimony and in a few scant notes in the archive. Ellis and Sechaba note the stolen car rackets and I heard as much from cadres in the Cape Flats. A perhaps apocryphal story that circulates in PAC circles recounts drug smuggling in the context of sourcing local arms. Former APLA cadres recall arriving at a dead drop where they expected to find arms deposited by their exile structures. When they dug up the container supposedly containing the weapons, they instead found bags of Mandrax and a note telling them to sell the drugs and buy arms on the black market within South Africa. It is up to the listener to interpret these meaning and veracity stories.
August 1983 opened the second period of confrontation, which saw the return of mass protest, a resurgence in the trade union movement, and the real possibility of a national insurrection. The pinnacle of organized protest was the successful boycott of the Tricameral elections held in August 1984. This early success signaled the arrival of a year-old organization capable of coordinating mass protest throughout South Africa, and low-voter turnout was an indication of the alignment of popular protest with the UDF. The third phase began with the eruption of nation-wide unrest that followed Vaal Triangle uprising in 1984/85, and the consequent declaration of a State of Emergency in 1985, which was extended to Cape Town in 1986. This period saw popular protest at full boil, marked a steep escalation in violence in all forms, and ended with the hobbling of the armed struggle and the disruption of the UDF. The most emblematic manifestation of this phase of struggle in Cape Town was the clearing of Crossroads squatter camp in May 1986. The events at Crossroads were a convergence of popular protests against forced removal, overlapping with street warfare between comrades, vigilantes, civilians and the state. The final stage saw a lull in organized protest and popular protest during the State of Emergency, but a steep increase in the frequency of armed actions.

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290 This was most evident in Cape Town, particularly among Coloured voters. However, these voter turnout statistics are far from transparent. Was this stay-away part of the heritage of the NEUM’s advocacy of non-collaboration, cascading popular enthusiasm for the UDF which was launched at an electrifying assembly in Mitchell’s Plain the year before, or the simple disinterest of an unconvinced body of voters? More research might add definition to these questions about the 1984 Tricameral election results. See Neville Alexander’s piece for more on the complexities of non-collaboration in the Cape Province. James, Wilmot G. et al. 1989. *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape*. Cape Town: David Philip. 180-192

291 The contradiction between the uptick in operations and downfall of the armed struggle, can be explained as a function of diminishing returns. While sheer numbers of attacks ramped up, epic and significant blows like the rocket attack on the Sasolburg oil storage complex in 1980, the
Organized protest and popular protest was severely interrupted by mass arrests and detentions. At the same time, separate lines of top secret commands within state security, namely the Civil Cooperation Bureau and Vlakplaas, assassinated popular UDF leaders and known or suspected underground cadres. Although the underground conducted more armed operations during this time, Fullard notes that these operations were increasingly small in scale, and infiltrated comrades faced almost suicidal survival rates. Her study concludes with the final wave mass protest leading up to and following the release of most political prisoners in 1989.

Unlike many other ‘struggle histories’ which conflate the entire landscape of resistance with a unitary liberation movement, or apartheid apologias that exaggerate the mortal threat posed by “Total Onslaught,” Fullard’s chronology accepts the existence of moments of overlap between these ‘sites of struggle,’ but rejects the idea that ‘resistance’ equaled “a Resistance,” while simultaneously delving deeply into the cynical complicities of state security strategies. Her grasp of the entire landscape of violence in the 1980s is breathtaking. Fullard paints a picture of a widely fragmented topography of resistance, and to a lesser degree,

detonation of limpet mines in Koeberg Nuclear Plant in 1982 became few and far between after 1985, while the small scale operations that typified this period demonstrated a lack of purpose, confusion about targeting and the splintering of decision making within the exile apparatus. When assessing Operation Nkomo, a mass deployment that followed the successful application of the Nkomati Accord and counterinsurgency operations in Swaziland, the phrase ‘human waves,’ borrowed from the cotemporaneous Iran-Iraq War, comes to mind. Given the survival rates of infiltrated cadres at the time, and the levels of infiltration in the forward areas, one could reasonably describe Operation Nkomo as throwing low-level cadres to the dogs.

292 The degree to which the CCB and Vlakplaas were part of the ordinary SADF command was a subject of much testimony during the TRC. The degree to which the CCB and Vlakplaas were part of the NSMS is better known. Still, the principle of plausible deniability deliberately muddles who was responsible to whom and for what. Lines of command are confused and often redrawn in testimony and cross-examination by commissions and in criminal trials.
the scatter-brained implementation of repression in the townships. As Fullard considers evidence of competition and conflict between different ‘sites of struggle’ and contradictions and failures within “Total Strategy,” she distinguishes between intentions of historical actors, and the outcomes of their actions.

This distinction is made all the more obvious in her provocative review of quantitative and empirical evidence of deaths in Cape Town in the post-1985 period. After 1985, when violence was at its worst, most civilian deaths were caused by other civilians. Perhaps more provocatively, she found that the underground killed more civilians than state agents, and contrary to more maudlin and elitist ‘struggle histories,’ the rank-and-file suffered the highest likelihood of torture and death. The numbers of deaths, the causes of deaths, and the relationship between deaths and repression and resistance cuts through the heart of oral narratives that portray strategy and practice as identical, describe the practice of political violence as purposeful and coherent, and foreground the experiences of political elites above a nameless and instrumentalized ‘crowd.’

Case in point is how the ‘forensic archive’ maps the complex topographies of political affiliation. Fullard’s most important insight is her novel conceptualization of categories of affiliation. In this scheme, Fullard preserves of the category of the ‘civilian,’ and applies this category in her review of forensic evidence. Glossed elsewhere as ‘the crowd,’ ‘the masses,’ or the ‘silent majority’ the rhetorical uses and abuses of these terms dulls the conceptual edge of much of the literature on the 1980s. At the time, all sides claimed to represent the will
of the people, and unwatchful commentators, more often than not, have tended to reiterate these claims in their writing. Cutting against this tendency, Fullard introduces her provocative finding; the fact that civilian groups caused the majority of deaths after 1985, which contravenes the widely held assumption that most deaths occurred during clashes between the state and resistance groups.

This finding inspires her thoughtful delineation of the term ‘civilian.’ Fullard, following Barrell and Seekings, points to the tenuous connections between exiles and their underground structures, the UDF and its affiliates, and to a lesser extent the state and its proxies and vigilante groups. Between and beyond these tenuous connections she points to what I would call a ‘franchising of political representation,’ where many groups affected a militaristic presence, mouthed what they knew of ‘Congress politics’, ‘cultural tradition,’ or the anti-communist rhetoric of the state, and embellished themselves in flags, uniforms and other accoutrement. The lack of command and control between exiles, the underground, and their constituents on the one hand, and the state and their allied civilian groups on the other hand, meant that at the street level there was a fair share of what Lenin termed ‘rustic craftsmanship.’ This descriptive term captures all of the organization, activity, and theorizing that goes on in the name of a particular party but is the result of isolation, decentralization, or outright autonomy of branch structures and hangers-on. In Cape Town, one could

293 Interestingly, Lenin’s solution to ‘rustic craftsmanship’ was an all-Russia newspaper. This form of party centralization through mass media later found expression after 1917 in the massive state investment in shortwave radio facilities. As exiles argued about how to reconnect and influence internal structures, “Radio Freedom” served this aim, among others. Lenin, Vladimir.
extend this definition beyond branch structures of either resistance groups or state proxies, and include all those claiming membership, those too junior to become members, and those advertising affiliation or effecting verisimilitude. This was the case particularly in areas where state authority receded, but the UDF and underground leadership did not or could not assume authority. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how this lack of command and control extended within more formalized underground structures, and the effect that stretched lines of communications had on the everyday experience of ‘underground work.’

Military and Combat Work

Turning to the underground itself, the topography of resistance and repression in Cape Town left a tight space for the deployment of classic theories of ‘underground work.’ Despite the iconic images of white troops barreling through the townships in armored vehicles, Fullard correctly points out that black vigilantes, deputized militias, and Third Force agents composed the cutting edge of government forces during the 1980s. The dimensions of the government’s

1909. What is To Be Done. New York: International Publishers. Ineke van Kessel noted that underground cadres and hangers-on in Cape Town in the 1980s used to have ‘beach parties’ where they would listen to the annual January 8th statement made by Oliver Tambo on Radio Freedom. This statement was referred to again and again by underground cadres as setting the agenda for isolated underground formations that were incommunicado with formal exile structures. Golden Mqwebu suggested that ‘Radio Freedom’ carried a wide array of programs that communicated exile perspectives on womens’ issues, trade unionism, and offered entertainment in the form of political theatre. The degree of reception of ‘Radio Freedom’ always remained in question for large metropolitan areas. It is unclear whether the apartheid state invested in jamming technology or if the shortwave transmitters in host states were inadequate. Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi wrote more on the significance of the Bantu Radios as well as the content of Radio Freedom. Both pieces explain the ways different political entrepreneurs used radio content to craft audiences. Lekgoathi, Sekibakiba Peter. 2009. You Are Listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation: Vernacular Radio, Bantustan Identity, and Radio Listenership, 1960-1994. Journal of Southern African Studies, 35 (3), 575-594. His piece on Radio Freedom is forthcoming.
repressive capacity in Cape Town also should give pause to triumphal ‘struggle historians’ who emphasize an omniscient and mobile underground presence. Fullard notes that in Cape Town alone, some 8,000 African men were deputized to be kitkonstabels—a militia of sorts that literally translates into ‘instant police’—and the witdoeke—a conservative vigilante group that was primarily Xhosa in ethnicity—showed up in the thousands during the political cleansing of Crossroads squatter camp in June 1986.\textsuperscript{294} Add to this the ability of the state to recruit agents within the ranks of the mass movement through detention. Max Ozinsky, an underground operative active in Cape Town in the mid-to-late 1980s, estimated that nationwide tens of thousands of individuals were detained during the state of emergency first declared October 1985. He then hypothesized that if only one out of hundred detainees ‘turned,’ the state returned hundreds of agents into the ranks of organized protest groups. Although Fullard revises Ozinsky’s estimate downward in Cape Town, Herman Stadler maintained that nationwide the state recruited secret agents with great ease. If this former Head of Intelligence for the Special Branch is to be believed, the one percent hypothesized by Ozinsky is a very conservative estimate of actual rates of recruitment.\textsuperscript{295} Thus the underground found itself facing a severe numerical disadvantage, a terrain littered with violent and secretive elements shielded and abetted by a powerful, if not always effective state, and dependent on alliances with a heavily penetrated mass movement.


\textsuperscript{295} Herman Stadler interview with Howard Barrell, date unknown.
How did underground cadres make sense of their predicament? What were their expectations of revolution within the claustrophobic space between repression and resistance? And how did the limits imposed by repression and resistance affect their perceptions of the situation in Cape Town and influence their practices and improvisations there?

The Ur-text of underground work is a useful place to begin this conversation. The official primer of the underground in the 1980s was a Soviet doctrine known as Military and Combat Work (MCW). Although MCW is hardly the Rosetta stone of archival sources on the underground, it is difficult to make sense of subsequent discussions of everyday life without some understanding of the myriad meanings associated with this text. The problem with interpreting the meanings of MCW is that it is a notoriously tricky text to pin down. It is difficult to pin-point the precise moment when Military and Combat Work became the operative doctrine for fomenting revolution. Cadres trained in the 1960s do not mention it by name, rank-and-file cadres in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to have limited exposure to it, and many ‘homegrown’ units given quick crash courses had only fleeting glimpses of these theories. Judging by my own reading of oral testimony, and Vladimir Shubin’s recollection of training programs, MCW occupied a central place in advanced training courses in the Soviet Union and Angola from the mid-1970s onward. Accordingly, references to Military and Combat Work appear most frequently in interviews with elite units drawn from

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296 Author unknown. Date unknown. Military and Combat Work. Fort Hare: Liberation Archive.

first generation of post-Soweto cadres who trained in Angola and the Soviet Union. Thereafter leading internal structures and exiled theorists debated this text heavily, and recapitulated their debates in contemporary interviews. In a sense, these debates never really ended, but were resurrected in retrospective explanations of the failures of the armed struggle. More often than not, 'literary critiques' of this text form the basis of post-transition political maneuverings and character assassinations in oral testimonies.

The status of this text among others is even less clear. Underground cadres read widely about revolution. And while MCW was the primer of most extended training programs abroad, it is difficult to determine whether the significance assigned to it in the post-transition period matches the significance it held in the underground at the time. Did trainees consider it bone-dry, doctrinaire and ill-suited to the specificity of the South African situation, did it measure up in the minds of trainees to other texts their own personal 'syllabi,' or was it a powerful and illuminating blueprint faithfully mapping the path to liberation?

The oral archive offers some clues to perceptions of MCW. Cadres, particularly the angry young students that went into exile for military training after Soweto, speak about MCW in tones of awe, almost as if it were Promethian fire. The hottest students describe the reception of MCW as almost an anointment into what Raymond Suttner called “revolutionary personhood.” The standard narrative here was that where once they were naïve firebrands who went into exile to pick up guns, they now picked up MCW and underwent a

Damascene conversion into disciplined revolutionary personhood. Further, MCW bore the imprimatur of Soviet experts who counseled above all else, caution, deliberation and preparation in the planning of revolution. Although these trainees had a variety of political affiliations, most respected the Soviet Union as a liberating force or at least a stalwart ally of the liberation movement. After receiving this text from on high, these students-turned-cadres had the utmost confidence in the text as a workable plan that warranted iron discipline and operational restraint in the practice of political violence. In many ways, their adherence to the text justified their acceptance of the more depersonalizing aspects of everyday life in the underground.

Others, such as Sue Rabkin--an underground cadre in Cape Town in the 1970s and strategist-in-exile working in Maputo in the 1980s--suggested that MCW lost importance after cadres were deployed into the underground. Faced with the realities on the ground, Rabkin noted that while her group diligently followed ‘the rules of secrecy’ they were an onerous burden that actually limited what they could accomplish. Although improvisation was marked as a sign of indiscipline she noted that ‘we were more successful when we ignored the textbook.’ 299 Although Rabkin maintains the effectiveness of her severely proscribed underground propaganda unit, she also reveled in the innovations she employed, and speculated that they could have accomplished much more had they been freer to improvise more.

299 Sue Rabkin interview with author, 5/12/08. Sue Rabkin interview with Howard Barrell, 7/7/89. Sue Rabkin interview with Howard Barrell, 11/26/90, Sue Rabkin interview with Howard Barrell, 11/27/90.
Aside from oblique mentions and incomplete descriptions in interviews, my only access to Military and Combat Work is a forty page document found in the Liberation Archive at Fort Hare. This document is entitled Military and Combat Work, bears no date, but describes elaborate sets of tasks necessary to prepare an underground capable of becoming a vanguard during a revolutionary moment. MCW was primarily urban in focus, and advised careful, deliberate, and incremental conscientization of the masses by underground units situated in the community. These units were to be organized into distinct political and military wings, and while their primary responsibility was conscientization, military units were later expected to embark on armed propaganda as a component of conscientization, all with the ultimate goal of drawing the people into a People’s War or general insurrection. Concurrent with conscientization, MCW dictated that the task of the underground also included infiltration and conversion of state structures of repression, namely the army and police. MCW, as understood by Soviet theorists, never presumed to induce a revolutionary moment, but held out the promise that a properly constructed political and military underground could seize initiative when the balance of forces tipped away from state hegemony and toward dual power. Only after a long period of underground work, and the contingent arrival of a revolutionary moment, could the underground become a vanguard and clear a path to state power, either through People’s War, or by general insurrection.

300 Author unknown. Date unknown. Military and Combat Work. Fort Hare: Liberation Archive.

301 But even while elite armed combatants received training in MCW, older focoist strategies held sway among a significant portion of theorists, and formed the strategic theory that underwrote a
This document is most unusual in that most trainees emphasized that no written or photographic materials left training facilities. One could safely assume that the documents used for training in Angola stayed in the hands of trainers, and returned with the Soviet officers contracted by the ANC. If copies circulated in underground units within South Africa they would have been jealously guarded, given that the content of MCW would be quite the trophy to any curious state agent. The fact that this document was not widely circulated has two important implications for understanding theoretical debates in underground cells.

First, once infiltrated, underground cadres recalled the lessons of MCW from memory. Like formulas for invisible ink, schematics of explosives, and methods of cryptography, the theoretical interpretations of MCW were only as good as the recollections of the interpreter. This left a wide field for debate and opportunities for improvisation through misremembered lessons or deliberate inventions. My discovery of a written version of MCW exposed a drift between how interviewees described MCW from long-term memory, and how the doctrine...
was described in writing. The most interesting discrepancy between oral interviews and written text is the emphasis interviewees placed on the tactical details of ‘underground work,’ such as dead letter drops, arranging secret meetings, signaling, losing tails, and other forms of spy craft. My text is almost entirely composed of the strategy of subversion and mobilization, and contains virtually no content on this sort of clandestine skullduggery. Whether the emphasis on spy craft above conscientization and infiltration was an inadvertent conflation, a profound omission of the theoretical context of said skullduggery, or a deliberate reprioritizing of tactics over strategy, is unclear but hotly debated in written evidence and oral testimony.

Second, knowledge of MCW was a source of power for infiltrated cadres inserted into existing underground structures. Underground structures recruited entirely within South Africa may or may not have had an extensive exposure to MCW. Conversely cadres deployed from the elite Angolan camps or elite cadres trained abroad, had, or at least assumed, a stance of authority on all matters pertaining to ‘proper’ underground work. This does not mean that their authority went unchallenged by experienced, ‘home-schooled’ cadres, but it certainly set the stage for power struggles based on knowledge of authorized texts. Pulling rank by ‘knowing what works’ is a common theme in oral testimony. ‘Knowing what works’ is largely a debate between memory of texts on the one hand, and experience, practice and improvisation on the other.

How did MCW frame debates within underground cells? Above all else this text is a profoundly historicist understanding of revolution-as-process. Although
one can never pinpoint the date of a revolutionary moment, the underlying theoretical assumption of MCW is that one can reasonably read social and economic conditions, anticipate the coming of a revolutionary moment, and exploit popular grievances and weaknesses in the state to hasten its arrival. MCW conferred a confidence in social and economic interpretation in a properly initiated reader, one that added to the presumed authority of Marxist theory in toto, and thus gave a profoundly historicist flavor to the memories of many of trained cadres. Time and time again in oral testimony, former underground cadres who can admit the ignominious denouement of the armed struggle, still largely presume that the underground failed to seize state power because of one or another misapplication of strategies or tactics. Further, their adherence to historicist reading of the armed struggle excludes a wide range of other reasons and rationales. In terms of MCW, most debates circle around whether enough attention had been paid to political mobilization vis-à-vis military operations. On one side of this debate stands Max Ozinsky who felt that not enough attention was paid to infiltrating the repressive apparatus of the apartheid state, and that the “military work” side of MCW was often misinterpreted to mean merely building the underground, and not compromising, converting or subverting soldiers, police and intelligence agents. On the other side of this debate stands Mac Maharaj,

303 Spencer Hodgson, son of the legendary Jack Hodgson, a founding member of MK and longtime SACP member, remembered seeing banners in Angola proclaiming in Portuguese that “Marxism-Leninism Will Win Because It Is True.” This anecdote preceded a measured but critical appraisal of the mentalité of the movement in the 1970s and 1980s. His comment, voiced in a phone interview with the author, had a distinctly ironic tone. Spencer Hodgson phone interview with author, 12/13/07.

304 Max Ozinsky interview with author, 1/24/08.
who spent most of the 1980s leading the reconstruction of the underground, and cited the preoccupation with ‘military work,’ however defined, as a drain on, what he argued, was the more important work of political conscientization within a committed popular constituency. What is most interesting about this debate is not why these arguments conflict, nor finding a way to reconcile them, but rather the common premises that they are built upon. Both Ozinsky, Maharaj and others assume that there is a right and a wrong way to build the underground and conduct the revolution, and their explanations of the 1980s both presume that along the way someone, somewhere, read something wrong and did something wrong.

The historical theories that animate MCW are based on historiographical manipulations perpetrated in official Soviet narratives on the Russian Revolution and partisan warfare in Eastern Europe during WWII. The manipulations are particularly glaring in state histories of these revolutions and in a separate genealogy of Soviet writings on Cuba. Above all else these manipulations

305 “Military work” in the context of Maharaj and O’Malley’s Shades of Difference did not mean the infiltration of security structures but heroic, but perhaps ultimately epiphenomenal, acts of violence, known in many testimonies as ‘hitting back’. “Military work” and “combat work” meant so many different things to so many people it is difficult to determine precisely what interviewees meant when they referenced either term in interviews. Clues provided in examples of actual operation usual suffice as a marker of one definition over another. This problem of conceptual clarity was not overlooked by underground cadres, who saw the theoretical confusion writ large in the gap between their commands and their operations in the field. O’Malley, Padraig and Mac Maharaj. 2007. Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa. Viking: New York.


307 An idea which, at least in the 1960s, conflicted wildly with the narratives offered by Castro’s ‘struggle heroes’. See Che Guevara’s articulation of Third World revolutions in the The African Dream. Cold War alliances aside, Guevara’s ideas, draw from his representations of the Cuban Revolution would be considered ‘revisionist’ by Soviet official historians of the Russian Revolution

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place the agency of the party over the contingency of events. In the most mild
form, the status of MCW as the blueprint of an effective underground, reserves
all authority on revolutionary strategy and tactics for the CPSU, and the CPSU
alone. This authority presumes that there is a right way and a wrong way to
plan for revolution, and the Soviet model--while subject to the odd authorized
revision here and there--was the most tried and tested because it ‘worked’ in
Russia in 1917 and again in Eastern Europe in the 1940s.

In its most extreme form, the official thinking behind these manipulations,
and the misreadings cadres derived from them, can best be described in an
example of a selective quotation of Marx. In the minds of the more incautious
historicists, ‘men make their own history.’ These same historicists often forget
that said ‘history making’ occurs ‘not at the time and the place of their
choosing’. So with some sort of version of this selective quotation in mind,
many exiled strategists conceded that while the underground led popular protests
from behind, and was out of joint with organized protest, they still vigorously
maintain that the underground was not entirely subject to contingent forces
beyond their control or anticipation.

Their assertions fail to hold up to voluminous oral and written evidence. In
the case of large uprisings like Soweto Uprising or the Vaal Triangle Uprising,

and the communist partisan warfare in WWII. Guevara, Che. 2000. The African Dream: The

308 See literatures on conflict between communist states claiming global revolutionary expertise.
The debates grow heated as anti-colonial struggles increase in frequency in the 1960s and
1970s. See The Global Cold War, Arne Odd Westad.

exiles neither predicted, controlled, nor entirely understood situations unfolding within South Africa. 310 Recently released Robben Islanders might have seen more, but remained focused on workers and peasants, and maintained only casual contacts with mainstream student groups. In short, both exiles and released Robben Islanders probably knew something was happening but didn’t know what it was. And, as I will later argue, in subsequent years the underground seemed unaware of these tectonic social shifts or at least unable to exploit their effects. 311 In short, historicism set the stage for the marked gaps that opened up between the theory and practice of underground work, creating a space for imagining new ways of performing the revolution most exiles and underground cadres believed was on the horizon. 312 Further, the degree to

310 For an interview that runs wildly against most evidence see the following. Jacob Zuma interview with Howard Barrell, 8/18/89.


312 To elaborate on this point, underground cadres active in the 1980s repeat the idea again and again that revolution is not contingent and layered with causes, but is a recipe that, properly applied, will yield a certain correct result. These two interviews are representative of these attitudes in both the leadership and in the middle ranks. Ronnie Kasrils interview with Howard Barrell, 10/28/90. Meshack Mochele interview with Wolfe Kodesh, 12/15/92. Struggle veterans adopt this stance not only because of their acceptance of the official Soviet narratives on revolution-as-process, but for careerist motives and self-preservation in the grossly unfair kingdom of post-apartheid state patronage. They have vested interests in taking their place in the grand narrative of revolution built on the Soviet model, and thereby repeat the interpretations implicit within this model in their descriptions of the armed struggle in South Africa. Sometimes this is a slavish recapitulation repeated ad nauseum, sometimes it is a more thoughtful critique of the mode of writing itself. Still, few interviewees break free from the fingertrap of historicism in their interviews.

Illusion of omniscience of party and correctness of practice of revolutionary violence, is recapitulated in official writings on Cuban revolution written by the ‘struggle veterans’ there. So even underground cadres who rejected the urban focus of MCW for the so-called ‘rural option’ of focoist guerrilla war still accepted this illusion. Author unknown. 1985. Ingwavuma Diary. Carter Karis Collection. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand. What is most disturbing is that subsequent generations continue to believe this revisionism, either unaware that it misrepresents the contingency and multiplicity of events, and cynically imposes the agency of the party over the
which interviewees still accept the historicist view greatly colors their oral testimony and the interpretive styles deployed therein.
The Danie Theron Combat School: Basic Tactics of the ANC offers a number of practical counterpoints to historicism narratives of the 1980s. The Danie Theron Combat School, established in 1967, operated as the proving grounds for an entire generation of SADF counterinsurgency specialists. My version of the training manual dates to July 1985, which provides a window in the official mind of SADF trainers at the cusp of the State of Emergency and in the year following the Vaal Triangle Uprising as well as a catalogue of thoughts about the last ten years of the armed struggle. In short this document provides an excellent segue for discussing the vignettes of everyday life in the underground that follow.

How does one characterize the status of this text vis-à-vis my version of MCW manual? Basic Tactics can be best described as an imperfect mirror of MCW. Whether it was drawn from a captured version of the formal MCW manual, or it was intuited from observed practice and operation experience, it is a snapshot of what SADF knew, the activities and tactics they anticipated, and perhaps an explanation of necessity of improvisation in Cape Town. In short, it is an index of what was known and anticipated about the underground. The predictive power of anticipation speaks volumes about the depressing rates of survival for underground units. It also throws into high relief the successes of those units that evaded detection and capture for a long time. In this regard, the Yengeni/Schreiner unit is noteworthy because it lasted for two years, perhaps

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longer than any other publicly known infiltrated unit in South Africa during the
1980s.

*Basic Tactics* is organized into four sections; basic background on ANC
strategy, the recruitment and deviation of aspirant terrorists, training
programmes, propaganda, the operation of MK, ANC rural operations, summary
of strong and weak points, and a conclusion. Each section contains bulleted lists
of the primary strategies and tactic employed by the underground to undermine
the state and bring about People’s War. *Basic Tactics* provides two important
points for evaluating readings of MCW in the underground. First is the hierarchy
of threats. The state recognized the threat posed by popular protest, organized
protest and underground protest but did not treat all three equally. The ranked
threats in *Basic Tactics* suggests that popular protests—the running street battles
and ad hoc confrontations in the townships—was the most easily managed
threat. Organized protest had a greater potential to disrupt the established order
than popular protest, but tellingly the author(s) of *Basic Tactics* singled out efforts
directed at whites as the most threatening. This priority is repeated again in
discussions of underground protest. Clearly the state saw the splitting of its
white constituency, and the subversion of the security apparatus inherent in this
cleavage as the most pressing threat to the state. This meant that the state
placed “military work,”—the infiltration, subversion and neutralization of the police,
army and intelligence services—above “combat work” which was defined by the
Soviets as the implementation of an underground capable of leading a “People’s
War” but misread by many in the underground as actual combat or a theatrical
obsession with ‘secret work.’ The order of importance of these lists is telling, particularly in the sections on recruitment and subversion. The state was most concerned with anti-conscription campaigns among whites, and propaganda that convinced whites of the impossibility of the maintenance of the status quo. Beneath these primary concerns were students, not defined by race. *Basic Tactics* sees popular disturbances as one way that the underground dislodges students from campus politics and funnels them into military training. This text seems least concerned with the running battles in the townships, which runs contrary to received image of the conflict in the 1980s. In addition, the discussion of tactics of the military side of the underground gives the impression that security forces could and did anticipate infiltration and operations. The author or authors of *Basic Tactics* both knew that the underground deployed cadres from their home areas, and thus could be easily identified, located and captured, and that ‘home grown’ units that received ‘blitz’ training conducted poor quality operations, on occasion blowing themselves up in the process. Simply put, the state’s reading of MCW, either in actual text or observed practice saw ‘military work’ rather than ‘combat work’ as the potential existential threat to state security. The degree to which underground units had the same readings, and applied them in practice determined the degree to which they were perceived as an actual existential threat.

Interestingly both MCW and *Basic Tactics* deploy the same mode of writing. Both texts project a tone that imbues the reader with a sense that they now have the interpretive power to read the landscape of resistance in South Africa in the
1980s. For the reasons noted above, both doctrines fail to anticipate the profoundly uncanny, contingent, and imaginative lived experiences of underground cadres and their adversaries. Following the arguments explained above, struggle histories and social histories written from these proscriptive documents can assume a convergence between intentions and outcomes. Instead of positioning these documents as blueprints, the unwary ‘struggle historian’ or ‘social historian’ might substitute them for the lived experience of the underground and those searching for it. Returning to Perrault, Ginzburg and these are the litany of factual details that cause the unwary to miss the forest for the trees.

The Habituated Eye

The composition of my vignettes follows a metaphor I developed in conversation with Shirley Gunn.\(^{314}\) Gunn’s biography and record of underground activity is far too complicated to exhaustively describe here. Suffice to say she was an elite cadre who received advanced combat training in Angola and training in ‘secret work’ at a facility in Cuba. She both excelled at marksmanship in Angola, and reveled in her mastery of underground work. About midway through my fieldwork, Gunn granted me three wide-ranging interviews that covered any numbers of topics.

One of the most interesting aspects of these interviews was her description of the clandestine photography techniques she learned in Cuba as part of a training program in ‘secret work’. The Cubans taught Gunn how to photograph

\(^{314}\) Shirley Gunn interview with author, 1/18/08. Shirley Gunn interview with author, 12/19/07. Shirly Gunn interview with author, 11/20/07.
strategic installations and potential targets by displacing the secret subject of her composition. This meant taking a picture of someone or something conspicuous and unimportant in the foreground while capturing the actual subject far off in the distance or in a corner of the frame. The purpose of this technique was to create plausible deniability should police confiscate the film as evidence. A picture with a waving, smiling figure in the foreground, could be interpreted as innocent, despite the fact that an army barracks, power transformer, or government building lie off in the distance.

This form of clandestine photography manipulates routinizing effects of a common compositional convention to conceal the true meaning of their photographs. In particular, clandestine photography manipulates the Pythagorean theorem, which is an almost ubiquitous compositional convention in Western pictoral art. Compositions that follow this theorem focus the action of the eye in certain predictable zones, namely at the four intersections formed by dividing the frame into fourths and thirds. This theorem is so commonly used in pictoral art that the eye of the viewer is, in a very strong sense, habituated to a certain predictable arrangement of visual elements. This habituation causes the viewer to anticipate that important visual elements will appear in these four intersections, and that other visual elements lying beyond and between these zones can be disregarded. Photographers, clandestine or otherwise, are aware of the habituating effects of this theorem on the eye, and that viewers cannot

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‘see’ without these conventions.\textsuperscript{316} Thus the photographer is able to exploit this phenomenon to great effect when concealing, distorting or demoting composed meanings or narratives.\textsuperscript{317}

Gunn reminisced that she practiced this technique in Cuba by photographing ordinary Cubans going about their day. She described this work as a sort of social documentary rendered in the style of ‘secret work.’\textsuperscript{318} Cuban regulations prevented cadres from keeping any written or photographic materials after their departure. After a pause she expressed regret that she did not have these photographs today, and longed to continue this sort of social documentary via candid camera. My eye was somewhere between habituated and un-habituated when I met Shirley Gunn.

This technique informs my reading of the oral testimony of former underground cadres. I argue that the habituated eye is a good metaphor for describing the compositional strategies deployed by interviewees. Like the clandestine photographer, interviewees encode meaning by displacing certain elements of their oral ‘compositions’. For example in several instances provided here, my interviewees mentioned important aspects of everyday life in passing. When pressed on these points they downplayed the importance of these experiences and then returned my attention to a narrative of their more illustrious


\textsuperscript{317} Conversely un-habituated viewers who are not routinized with these conventions do not automatically fix their eyes on the usual intersections, and in certain instances, can see displaced subject encoded in the composition. Shirley Gunn interview with author, 1/18/08. Shirley Gunn interview with author, 12/19/07. Shirly Gunn interview with author, 11/20/07.

\textsuperscript{318} This social documentary through candid camera is reminiscent of Ruttmann’s 	extit{Berlin: Symphony of a Great City}. Ruttmann, Walter. 1927. 	extit{Berlin: Symphony of a Great City}. USA: Fox Film Corporation.
activities. This demotion of experience over grand narrative may be a deliberate concealment, either because such details conflict with intended narrative, or because social tensions among cadres prevent them from addressing certain topics, or interviewees themselves cannot ‘see the forest for the trees’. Learning to ‘see’ around these strategies, and un-habituate the reader’s eye, is more about selectively re-centering demoted experiences than transparently reproducing foregrounded historiographical ‘rescue attempts.’

Much of the evidence of experience presented in the vignettes foregrounded a historicist narrative over aspects of everyday life, as defined by Ginzburg. For example, when Cecyl Esau mentioned *The Red Orchestra* and John LeCarre novels, he did so only in the context of a more conventional syllabus he drew up as the political commissar of his unit.\(^{319}\) *The Red Orchestra* and LeCarre’s writings only assumed importance after they were cut off from exile structures in Botswana, and denied access to more ‘textbook’ materials on underground work. But his mention of these fictional and non-fictional texts unlocked the meaning of many of his subsequent stories, which foregrounded rich images of ‘tradecraft’ relayed with an obvious sense of pride. Esau also casually flagged two genealogies of fiction and non-fiction that turned up in other oral testimonies and decrypted intelligence reports presented in court.\(^{320}\) Only a few interviewees saw any value in recounting the routine, the seemingly mundane, or the burdensome aspects of everyday life. For these interviewees

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\(^{319}\) Cecyl Esau interview with author, 11/14/07.

\(^{320}\) Ozinsky mentions LeCarre, and snipped of intelligence reports in Yengeni Trial Documents makes mention of *The Red Orchestra*. 
the stuff of history came from a recitation of events. The positioned the ‘litany of facts’ ahead of a history of imagination, improvisation, and performance. The mode of writing employed below attempts to allow the reader to ‘see’ foregrounded and displaced evidence at the same time. One way of doing this is to constantly switch between habituated and un-habituated ‘ways of seeing.’

Not all foregrounding and displacement is the result of deliberate manipulations. As Judith Van Allen pointed out to me, the enclosed vision of a tightly organized cellular underground is not unlike the limited horizon that plagued guerrillas fighting in the bush in the Wankie Reserve. As former cadres stress again and again, their vision of their world was hemmed in by a ‘need to know’ existence, or was occluded by the walls of secrecy erected between cells. After 1980 the underground in Cape Town began to be organized into cells of three or four individuals, and only one of these three could access the cell above. These horizontal and vertical limits are evident in oral testimony—the memory of many underground cadres was segmented by the formal structure of a cellular underground. In other words, many did not know what was going on in the next cell over, or if the next cell over even existed.

This circumscribed vision has a number of important implications when assessing oral evidence of everyday life in the Cape Town. First, no individual testimony can be considered as ‘representative,’—the evidentiary shibboleth that validates much social history and underwrites ‘struggle history.’ Second, since

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322 Which is not to say that underground cadres did not hear rumors, or that rumors were not valid sources of knowledge about the activities of other cells.
no individual testimony can be characterized as ‘representative,’ the purpose of this chapter is not to place these vignettes together to form some cumulative truth. Third, the subject position of the author, and by extension the reader, permits them wider field of vision than most interviewees. Fourth, the limits imposed by vision, and the limits imposed on memory, is not an obstacle to be overcome, it is evidence in and of itself. An important part of evaluating oral evidence experience is recognizing an interviewee’s awareness of its limits. What this means, by extension, is that oral testimony of this kind is by nature unique and anecdotal. From this, one could make a reasonable claim that the quest for representivity is at best misleading, and at worst Quixotic. A more fruitful exploration of experience must begin and end with an appreciation of difference, rather than a plowing under of the anecdotal and unique. Accordingly I chose to flag the limits of vision of my interviewees in each vignette, and avoid generalized comparisons.

Finally I use written evidence to curate these oral testimonies. They include oral interviews conducted by myself, oral interviews conducted by others, novels, published memoirs, operational histories, affidavits, confessions and court testimony, TRC testimony, and documents such as an MCW manual and encoded field-notes captured in a raid and later decoded by police cryptographers. Each kind of written evidence can flag instances of displacement that are deliberately and inadvertently reproduced in these vignettes.
Three Vignettes

In order to place these vignettes into some sort of structure and chronology I provide the following narrative summaries of relevant facts. As evident in Chapter One underground activity in Cape Town dated to the very first months of the armed struggle in 1961. But much of this underground activity either disappeared or lay dormant after the Rivonia Trial in 1964. Although this

I foreground these particular groups above others for their explanatory power and conceptual richness. At another level, I selected individuals from these groups primarily because I was most confident in my evidence on these individuals. This should not be taken as an implicit hierarchy of the importance of one or another group over others. It is simply a convenient way of bringing conceptually useful instances of everyday life to the surface. Significant but excluded individuals and groups include; Oscar Mpetha, a long time trade unionist with connections to MK. Mpetha is spoken of in almost hushed tones in Worcester and Cape Town. He spent time on Robben Island, was released in the late 1970s, served as an iconic figure in the trade union movement in Cape Town, and was implicated in the murder of a truck driver in 1987. The Bonteheuwel Military Wing (BMW) composed of the legendary Ashley Kriel among others was perhaps the most organically situated unit in the history of the underground in Cape Town. Or at least that is how the BMW is portrayed in celebratory histories. In any case, the meaning most often assigned to the BMW was that they were a group that was firmly embedded in ‘the crowd,’ and a symbol of the overlap of popular protest and underground protest. I did not have an entrée into Bonteheuwel and I do not speak Afrikaans. This limited my exposure to veterans of the BMW. Although the Gugulethu Seven are an important part of the story of Cape Town in the 1980s, I did not count them strictly as an MK group because they were recruited by a phony branch set up by the security police. Their story, and memorialisations of the seven have generated considerable debate, but I could not place them alongside units I knew to be formally inducted into MK. Shirley Gunn, another legendary underground cadre, graciously gave me two interviews and the conceptual frame for my vignettes. I am indebted to her for this material, but I intend to write at length about her interviews at another date. Khaya Himana graciously invited me into his home in Pinelands. Himana gave me a very intimate interview, but reiterated again and again that he had said his piece in writing. He authored a very astute Master’s thesis on the integration of the non-statutory forces into the SANDF, but his constant reference to his writing indicated a reluctance to speak beyond generalities. Yazir Henry operates Cape Action Tours, which is part of the Direct Action Center for Peace and Memory, one of the longest running NGOs working with veterans in the Western Cape. Yazir gave a very difficult and complicated testimony before the TRC. When I met him he was in ill health and seemed reluctant to recount this testimony. Given this I did not pursue an interview with him. The Self-Defense Units were ‘militias’ of sorts created during township violence to help police zones of “People’s Power” during ruptures in state authority in the 1980s. Their linkages to the exile structures have always been in question, but they are too irregular and too aggrieved to be included here. This does not, however negate their claim for compensation, as the former members of the SDUs now comprise the ‘Under 35s,’ men and women who were under the age of 35 when the transition occurred, and thus disqualified for benefits. Consequently, their contentious claims for compensation prevented many “SDU-members-turned-Under 35s” from speaking with me.
periodization is contested by recent scholarship, most earlier works locate the second phase of the underground to 1976.  

This chapter dates the return of the underground in Cape Town with the arrival of Sue Rabkin and David Rabkin on January 1st, 1971. Sue Rabkin, born in England, came from an active trade unionist background, met and fell in love with David Rabkin in London. After being recruited by “Frank” sometime in 1969 or 1970, they joined the SACP and underwent explosives training at a rural cottage in the Cotswolds and secret work in flats around London. They married shortly before departing by ship for Cape Town in late 1970. Following this they were deployed to Cape Town. In an episode that foreshadowed the world of disguises they would come to inhabit, they were met by David Rabkin’s cousin, who, according to Sue Rabkin was going through a ‘transvestite phase and was dressed in full regalia.’ They stayed in Clifton with David Rabkin’s wealthy aunt, presumably in a grannie flat or spare apartment. Following this they had a child together, operated a secret print shop at their residence, and built and planted bucket bombs around Cape Town for the next four and a half years. They were joined by Jeremy Cronin after he returned to South Africa from the Sorbonne in the early 1970s. All three remained active and undetected until July 1976, when

324 The exile structure responsible for rebuilding the underground after 1976 was known as Internal Reconstruction and Development. The fact that this name uses the term ‘reconstruction’ seems to imply that at least exiles seemed to agree this was a new phase rather than the activation of a long dormant, but otherwise intact underground. For the opposing view see Raymond Suttner, “__________”.

325 Sue expressed some reluctant about the marriage in her interview. This reluctance stems less from her love for David and perhaps more from her desire to be taken seriously as an independent entity within a sometimes depressingly chauvanistic underground. See Pregs Govender for more on chauvinism in the Natal underground. Govender, Pregs. 2007. Love and Courage: A Story of Insubordination. Johannesburg: Jacana.
the police arrested Sue, David, and eventually Jeremy. Sue Rabkin gave birth to
her second child in detention, but was spared a significant prison sentence and
left South Africa for work in the exile structures. David Rabkin and Jeremy
Cronin were convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison. Following their
release David Rabkin trained in Angola and elsewhere, and Cronin remained in
South Africa working with the UDF and ANC underground respectively. Sue
Rabkin later played an integral role in the underground structures in Mozambique
that serviced KwaZulu and Natal from the early 1980s onwards.326

The second cluster of underground cadres grew up in the winelands and
the Boland, but particularly in townships in and around Worcester. Cecyl Esau
was part of this group that included several individuals who fled for exile and
trained in Angola and several individuals who remained in South Africa and
formed underground units. Esau remained in South Africa, attended UWC and
participated in student politics there. As conditions turned more violent in Cape
Town in the first few years of the 1980s, Esau noted a distinct personal drift
toward the armed struggle, while maintaining his status as a student activist. At
some point, Esau joined others and formed an underground unit, presumably
part of MK. Eventually Esau ended up in a cell commanded by the illustrious
Lizo Ngqungwana, which was organized in an unusual manner. These cadres
were part of an Area Politico-Military Committee (APC) which was an integrated,
non-parallel structure that folded military and political wings into one structure. At

326 Evidence of her importance in Maputo is self-evident. After the 1984 Nkomati Accord between
South Africa and Mozambique expelled the majority of known underground MK in Mozambique,
the ANC was allowed to keep a skeleton crew of five or six representatives in Maputo. Sue
Rabkin was one of those persons.
some point in 1985 the police discovered the unit and successfully arrested, 
tried, and convicted Esau and his comrades. Esau spent the next few years on 
Robben Island. The dates of his political and military activity extend roughly from 
the mid-1970s until his capture in 1985. Esau currently works for the Institute for 
a Democratic Alternative in South Africa, and is writing a historical biography of a 
worker who lived in the Boland in the 19th century.327

I have the best evidence from the Yengeni/Schreiner unit, known also as 
the Basil February Detachment of Umkhonto we Sizwe. The Yengeni/Schreiner 
unit assumed authority for underground operations in the Western Cape after the 
collapse of Lizo Ngqunwana’s unit in 1985. Although personnel rotated in and 
out of the unit, it was composed of integrated three branches, the leadership was 
composed of highly trained exiles successfully reinserted into South Africa, the 
propaganda unit consisted of activists-cum-cadres recruited at UCT, and the 
military wing included cadres from the Cape Flats, primarily Crossroads but also 
other locations as well. The two subjects of the vignette below, Chris Giffard and 
Max Ozinsky, were recruited as student activists at UCT, began with propaganda 
work, and eventually took separate paths into intelligence work and military work, 
respectively. In terms of the vignette below, this integrated structure meant that 
cadres shared a number of responsibilities, and could comment on both political 
and military matters. All three branches of this unit conducted a significant

327 His work will soon be published. Please contact Andrew Bank in the History Department at 
UWC for more details. On a unrelated note, UWC misspelled Cecyl Esau’s name on the 
dormitory dedicated in his name. The name on his business card reads Cecyl, while the dorm 
name plate reads Cecil.
number of operations. Finally, significant evidence suggests that this unit, unlike others before it, had extensive connections to organized protest groups within and without the UDF. This evidence does not suggest that the unit was the ‘puppet master’ of organized protest groups, but intelligence was collected on, and shared with, a wide array of aboveground formations. Finally, as noted above, this group has the distinction of being one of the longest surviving publicly known underground units. In the late 1980s, the estimated time of survival for infiltrated cadres ran around 4 to 6 months. In contrast, The Yengeni/Schreiner unit operated for over two years. A complex tangle of reasons explains the longevity this group, but many of these reasons can be inferred from the vignettes below. Their trial was the last terrorism trial of the 1980s and ended with the state dropping its case against the accused.

**Legendary Performances**

In a series of extended interviews over the past three decades, Sue Rabkin provided the most significant description of the underground in the 1970s and

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328 The unit successfully placed a bomb outside of the magistrates court in Athlone on June 12th 1987, a gas station on July 19th 1987, and detonated a bomb outside an apartment building housing primarily SAAF officers, located on Tennant Street in the CBD on July 20th 1987, bombed a women’s bathroom in Jan Smuts Airport on July 21st 1987. The propaganda unit printed large amounts of leaflets and pamphlets. These materials did not seem to be distributed by the propaganda unit themselves, but were shuttled to cadres on the Cape Flats who distributed them to their end readership. On occasion the propaganda unit assisted with the transport of weapons and personnel to and from Botswana, Cape Town, and other regional locales.

329 Sue Rabkin interview with Howard Barrell 7/7/89.

330 My interviewees suggested that the state did not so much drop the case out of a lack of evidence as a loss of will. The negotiated settlement and the suspension of armed struggle seemed to overtake the state’s resolve to punish captured terrorists in what were largely show trials.
1980s, as told by both an underground cadre and exiled strategist. Consequently, her testimony casts a long shadow over the oral record as presently composed. Noting this significance is important for two reasons. First, she has such an extensive archive of stories and chronological accounts that it is impossible to arrive at a ‘representative’ summary of her testimony. What follows is a selection of stories from two interviews she gave the author in May 2008, and a third interview with Wolfie Kodesh, a party stalwart who conducted a series of interviews in 1993. Second, Rabkin served on both sides of the border, first as a cadre and then as a strategist. Likewise it is sometimes difficult to disaggregate observations drawn from one locale or in one capacity and projected over another. This does not mean this testimony is disorganized, it is simply important to note that her experiences as an underground cadre in Cape Town in the early 1970s are often indexed against her experiences as an exiled strategist in Maputo during the 1980s. This reflexive quality infuses her testimony with a simultaneity; she is interpreting as she is telling, and telling as she is interpreting.

The material presented here limited to her experiences in Cape Town in the early 1970s. Rabkin provided a loose chronology, but the real richness of her testimony lies in the stories she tells. She described this period as “The Dark Ages.” Her group was isolated, beholden to the Revolutionary Council in London, and under constant threat of arrest. Jeremy Cronin, a cadre who later

331 In the parlance of the underground a legend is the combined false biography, physical disguise and performed persona of an underground cadre. The word has a specificity in the context of secret work that terms like incognito, alias, and secret identity fail to capture.
joined the unit, implicitly contrasted the underground of the 1970s with the underground of the 1980s. Underground cadres in the 1980s could rely on a fairly extensive network of politically-engaged sympathizers who assisted with safe houses, medical treatment, and temporarily caching propaganda and ordinance. For instance, in the mid-1980s Cronin, then on the run, was able to visit his wife and newborn son after visiting hours because the hospital staffed by sympathetic doctors and nurses. Cronin also gave the sense of mobility and awareness that contrasted with the immobility and the limited field of view that plagued units in the 1970s. The sense one gets from Rabkin’s testimony is that networks of politically-engaged sympathizers, if they existed, were out of reach of this unit, which was under strict orders to avoid any contact that might reveal their political leanings. This was the era before popular and organized protest, when underground work was a lonely, isolating affair that bonded units together in constant theoretical discussions and the intimacies of everyday life.

Their assigned duties were severely curtailed by a number of factors. This was a propaganda unit, directed to reproduce and distribute material authored by the leadership in London. Rabkin noted two frustrations with this top down arrangement. First, the unit could not produce materials in reaction to events on the ground, it had to wait for material authored by the Revolutionary Council. Since these were loyal, committed party members on the whole they obeyed these directives, often allowing opportunities for agitation to pass by because of delays in communication with London. This lead to periods of ‘intense boredom;’ a phrase I use to describe not inactivity born of laziness, but inactivity born of
being disciplined but disconnected from distant party leaders. This time was not idle, but spent endlessly theorizing revolutionary politics, while enduring a constant fear of arrest. Eventually the unit grew impatient with these delays and began to write and distribute its’ own material. When the unit finally struck out on their own they published Umsebenzi--a double-sided sheet which paired an analysis of news on the front page with lessons on ‘secret work’ on the back page. Tellingly, their lessons on ‘secret work’ did not come from their formal training in London, but rather was drawn from their experiences on the ground in Cape Town. To quote Sue Rabkin, ‘you learned on the job’. Accordingly when the offered ‘job training’ to others they did not tear a page from the textbook, they borrowed a page from their notebooks. In turn their improvisations became authentic underground document for their readers, and lent an aura of authority to ‘secret work’ derived from improvisation.

But who was reading what they produced? The Rabkins had smuggled an address list of trade unionists, church members, and stalwarts presumably compiled in the years before exile. Sue Rabkin noted that the unit posted their cyclostyled pamphlets in the mail, but, following this they had no way of knowing whether anyone actually received them. She speculated that the post office could have easily intercepted the material and burned it. Because they were forbidden contact with any political groups, they literally received no feedback. Therefore the unit inhabited an insular space, broken only by intermittent contact with the Revolutionary Council in London, and infrequently reproducing material for an unknown number of readers. These limitations meant that everyday life in
this unit became primarily the maintenance of appearances through the performance of legends.

Rabkin provided a cavalcade of rich stories about these performances. The Rabkins lived with David Rabkin’s aunt, in a flat beneath her house in Clifton. Their day-to-day task was to maintain the appearance of a young, fashionable, and worldly couple. This meant quietly acquiescing to the willful ignorance that permeated the polite refined circles they traveled in. Rabkin was acutely aware of the ever present oppressive effects of apartheid, and as a committed communist felt a duty to confront those who turned a blind eye to the situation. But maintaining her legend meant the outward acceptance of the status quo, even while and inward self-hatred boiled into rage. This directive not to ‘break character’ took an enormous psychological toll. Every off color remark, every casual instance of racism, every contentious political point had to be left alone by committed communists maintaining the pretense that they were apolitical, if little bohemian, sophisticates. As Rabkin noted, ‘eventually you learn to dislike yourself, although it might be for a higher cause.’ At the beginning of her four years, Rabkin hated guns, by the end of her four years she wanted to “pick up every gun she saw.”

In a sense one can read Rabkin’s stories about legends and disguises as evidence of sublimation. While never ‘fun’ in any sense, her stories do convey at least a satisfaction in her powers of deception, as well as a sense of accomplishment in her specialty in the unit; secret work. This satisfaction was born out of the somewhat unsatisfying work of being the local print shop for a
distant Revolutionary Council. Case in point was her story about purchasing a birthday gift for David Rabkin’s Uncle Vic. Uncle Vic was the arts editor for Die Burger, a man who saw himself as part of the artistic intelligentsia of white society in Cape Town. Accordingly he saw David and Sue Rabkin as social assets, as recent arrivals bringing to parochial Cape Town some of the cosmopolitan culture of London. The Rabkins were aware of the uncle’s perceptions and needed to live up to the expectations of others by offering a stylish gift befitting their status. This posed a dilemma for underground cadres living on ‘operational funds.’ Sue stated that they agonized for weeks over the gift. Eventually they settled upon a little pot of caviar, and went to the food section of Stutterfords. Confronted with dozens of different kinds of caviar Sue turned to David:

“I said to David… ‘the whole point is we’ve got to get him the best. You know what the best caviar is, I haven’t got a clue.’ So David stood there, really he was very resourceful, David. And he said to me completely straight faced, ‘I think it is Beluga.’ So I said, ‘How do you know? You’ve never even had it.’ And he said ‘James Bond eats Beluga caviar, and I think Ian Fleming always did his homework.’” 332

Rabkin then stated that they gave Vic the caviar wrapped in gold paper and that he and his guests were duly impressed.333

Rabkin recounted another story that illustrated the subtlety of disguises and their reception by different audiences. Typing two thousand names and

332 Sue Rabkin interview with unknown, 3/24/93.

333 Rabkin followed this story up with another anecdote about maintaining the impression that they were moneymed sophists andates. Periodically she would remove ‘operational funds’ from a separate account, flash the wad of bills in front of her family and acquaintances, and then return the money to the same account. In actuality, the Rabkins lived on a shoestring budget. All ‘operational funds’ went to the purchase of equipment and material for reproducing propaganda.
addresses was an onerous, time consuming task that increased the chances of exposure during their brief windows of production. To increase their productivity Rabkin located the supplier of an addressograph, which used specially treated plates to mechanically address printed material. With an addressograph the unit could crank out an edition in a shorter window of time, which was a key improvement since neighbors to leave the adjacent apartments in order to operate the cyclostyle machines. But the gains in efficiency had to be weighed against the risks associated with picking up the addressograph and etching plates from the supplier. Such material was closely monitored by security police, and this sort of point of contact could become a breakthrough as investigators honed in on the unit.

Rabkin disguised herself in a motley mix of accessories and affectations. Calling herself Tina Davis, Rabkin affected a French accent, took off her wedding ring, and wore a doek and heavy makeup. She avoided buying a wig for fear that the police would take notice of the purchase. Her goal was to look ‘as non-descript as possible.’ The crux of the story is contained in two epilogues. First when Rabkin was arrested she was introduced to the whole of the security police as ‘Tina Davis’. She later learned that the police had been looking for her alias for two years. For someone who assumed responsibility for ‘secret work’ within the unit, this successful deception was an enormous source of pride. Second, the Coloured stock clerk who had helped her load the plates at the supplier, presumably had the best chance of identifying the defendant as ‘Tina Davis.’
When he took the stand at her trial he could not positively identify ‘Tina Davis’ as Sue Rabkin. On the stand this man, as Rabkin quoted him in a Coloured accent, squinted his eyes and stated ‘maaaybe she is… and maaaybe she isn’t…’. This dent in the state’s case against the accused came not in her ability to fool the stock clerk—he was the audience of a disguise not a legend—but in her mastery of ‘secret work’ that allowed for the visual ambiguity which could later be exploited by reluctant state witnesses.

After her description of her arrest, time in jail, and trial Rabkin then attempted to sum up the accomplishments of the unit. She called on two stories to sum up their activities. Because the unit was never assured that their printed material reached its intended readership, the true measure of their success was the length of their survival. Survival depended on their mastery of secret work, rendered in performances before an audience of rarified acquaintances and close family. The fulfilled expectations of this audience came in a story that overlapped fashion, disbelief and legends. Rabkin prefaced her story by stating that black nail polish was in vogue among ‘trendy’ Capetonians in the mid-1970s. After her capture one of Rabkin’s acquaintances confided in her father-in-law, ‘I simply don’t believe Sue is a communist, I mean she wears black nail polish!’335 To which her father-in-law allegedly retorted, ‘I find Sue’s politics more acceptable than the way she dresses.’

Later on she told a story about footwear. Prior to their first rendezvous with Jeremy Cronin, Sue sent recognition signals to London written in secret ink. Sue told the Revolutionary that she would be wearing red satin espadrils as her signal for the rendezvous. “Apparently Dr. Dadoo said to Frank, ‘who is this? What are red satin espadrils?’ Dadoo, then a ranking member of the Revolutionary Council had to turn to Frank’s wife Eleanor, who informed him that red satin espadrils were the ‘latest style of fashionable shoe.’ Dadoo’s lack of knowledge about current fashion was less about the stodgy unhipness of an older generation of party leaders, and more about how far Sue Rabkin had drifted away from standard tradecraft and into her own refashonings of ‘secret work.’

With these stories in mind, I asked Sue what sort of fantasies she harbored about underground work. Her answer took these stories in a different direction. Her fantasies did not include playful reminiscences of posing as a socialite, instead she recalled that her time in Cape Town was ‘absolutely the worst four years of [her] life.’ She harbored fantasies about the ANC underground itself, which she initially believed was ‘an organization which was populated by strong, clear, principled, brave warriors.’ When the unit repeatedly failed to receive copy from the Revolutionary Council in London, the veil dropped on the transparent, well-functioning machinery they thought they had joined. More skeptical than the others, Rabkin pressed the matter with ‘Frank’ on a visit home. Rabkin asked ‘Frank’ about the apparent lack of activity inside the country, aside from their propaganda unit. At the same time she suggested that if this was the case that

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336 Sue Rabkin interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/24/93.
the unit be allowed to produce more. Frank gave her a dressing down, and said ‘why do you think you are the only unit?’ Humiliated by this exchange Rabkin returned to Cape Town and said to David and Jeremy, ‘you know I’m never doing that again, because he made me feel like such an ass that I’d even asked such a question. That I’d doubted the movement. We are obviously part of a huge network.’ Six months after Rabkin was arrested and released she returned to London and learned that “[they] were indeed the only unit.”

**Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Cadre**

On a hot dry afternoon spent in the shade of a community gymnasium, Captain Mohlale described how elements from popular and organized groups were formed into underground protest cells in the early 1980s. The arc of his narrative traced shifts in organization, training and recruitment during the reconstruction of the underground in Cape Town. Mohlale saw two important shifts in the years after the Soweto Uprising but before the Vaal Triangle Uprising. First was the creation of a skeletal underground organized in a classic cellular structure. From the early 1980s onward, underground cadres would be placed into groups of no more than five people, with only one cadre in contact with the next cell above or below. This renewal of underground protest groups was born from both inserted exiles and the remains of organized protest groups—primarily student organizations—that were banned or decapitated by the repression after 1976. In this schematic, the division between aboveground and

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337 Sue Rabkin interview with Wolfie Kodesh, 3/24/93.

338 Captain Mohlale interview with author, 1/25/08
underground organizations should be maintained. The schematic could be interpreted as an application of the M-Plan followed a generic blueprint for a cellular organization that was widely followed in a number of conflicts. The second shift was in recruitment. Once formed, this nucleus of underground cadres provided political education to a new generation of radicalized youths. These classes allowed cadres to gauge the aptitude and commitment of potential recruits, select and vet potential recruits, and funnel them off to cells. This transmission belt ended in formal oathing and training in combat tactics and the rules of secrecy. Mohlale then gave a long description of the procedure for arrest and interrogation. If captured, a cadre was bound to uphold one rule; say nothing for twenty-four hours. Holding out allowed others in his cell would note his absence and then go into hiding or leave the country. Mohlale had confidence in these and other rules. If properly applied the overall integrity of all cells could be maintained after a single arrest. Disregard for the rules and sloppy behavior could lead to multiple arrests that could bring down the entire structure. The most serious threat to the new cellular structure came from informants and agents. He provided a long litany of textbook processes for vetting recruits. In many ways his account is the bare litany of details that Perrault counterposed against his more literary account.

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The procedures described by Mohlale, while instructive and chronological do not match other testimony in either form, content, or richness of detail. Case in point is testimony provided by Cecyl Esau, which serves as a colorful and instructive counterpoint to more idealized versions. Esau gave me a nearly complete life history that traced his involvement first in student politics, then in UDF structures and finally his descent into an underground cell of MK. This chronology is traced above, but across this arc Esau foregrounds practices of recruitment and training in ‘secret work.’

Following his student activism on the UWC campus, his work as a rural recruiter for the UDF, Esau and his associates began to question the utility of non-violent aboveground organizing. When I asked if this turn to armed struggle generated any debate within his group, Esau abruptly answered no. His answer was a familiar refrain among students-turned-activists-turned-cadres, “that they couldn’t continue to go on mobilizing and organizing in the same way.” Around the time of the campaign against the Tricameral election, this group began to seek out individuals ‘in the know’ about possible MK contacts. Much of the rest of his testimony dealt with learning about attempting what I would call ‘the approach’ and later how to handle those who tried ‘the approach’ on his fully formed underground unit.

Marking a departure from Mohlale’s account, Esau noted that this group was not actively recruited, but rather sought out someone who they thought had a connection to MK.\footnote{This sort of ‘bottom-up’ approach carried enormous risks, particularly later in the decade when counter-insurgency units posed as MK recruiters. Wilson, Lindy. 2000. The Gugulethu Seven.} In order to receive formal training, oath allegiance to a
chain of command, and thus become a ‘real’ underground unit, they needed to link up with someone on the inside. They knew that such individuals traveled in their circles, and as the list narrowed Esau identified the most likely candidate. The way Esau later described the ‘approach—the narrative conventions he deployed, the images he selected, the aura of suspense he conveyed—are at least as important as the mechanical details. Esau had met a man in Victor Verster Prison while briefly imprisoned in 1976, he later served with him on the Student Representative Council at UWC in 1977 and in 1979, this man held a discussion group with several of the members of Esau’s future unit. This was a man who was both known and unknown, inconspicuously stood on the periphery of wider networks of student activists, and was continually present at the formation of important activist groups. When Esau finally made ‘the approach’, he met the man at night and told him of his intentions of forming a unit. The man laughed and then told him, ‘let’s go for a walk.’

Like many testimonies from underground cadres, Esau is not primarily concerned with building a chronology of events. His narrative does dovetail with Mohlale’s description of shifts in organization, training and recruitment on one vital point. In the first years of the 1980s the exile structures servicing underground units took several casualties after the SADF launched a series of cross border raids into Lesotho, Botswana and Mozambique. With several linkages severed, and the possibility of mass infiltration in question, internal reconstruction of the underground took a different tack. Instead of recruiting

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South Africa: Wilson Films. In other parts of the country, agents posing as trainers took would-be recruits to remote areas and had them ‘practice’ with tampered grenades.
untrained cadres, sending them into exile for formal training and then returning them wholly formed units, the task was now to insert just a handful of individual cadres from exile who would then conduct the entire training program inside the country. Barring this, recruits could be sent into a neighboring country for ‘crash courses’ in MCW, here interpreted as handguns, explosives, and the basics of ‘secret work.’

As the political commissar of the new unit, Esau was charged with collecting literature for political education and training. For a time the unit had a connection to the exile structures servicing the Cape from Botswana, but a series of quick arrests, and the departure of key individuals severed the link. Prior to this Esau assembled training materials from whatever could be smuggled into the country, which was then mixed into a bricolage of other sources; the odd copy of *Umsebenzi* or *African Communist*, journalism on contemporary struggles elsewhere, and memoirs and fiction. Esau listened to January 8th addresses by Oliver Tambo on Radio Freedom, but reception of exile broadcasts in Cape Town was intermittent at best.341 After the quick departure of key members around Christmas 1984, the severing of the ‘interlibrary loan’ with official exile structures in Botswana and the infrequency of contact with cadres coming into the country, Esau had to look elsewhere for reading material.342

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341 Ineke Van Kessel commented on Radio Freedom paper delivered at the WISER Radio Colloquium.

342 As noted above the months after the Vaal Triangle uprising saw a massive increase in public disorder in South Africa. Concurrent with this was the deployment of newly improvised approaches to the ‘Total Onslaught.’ In addition to the thousands of *witdoeke* and *kitkonstabels*, Esau’s not-yet-active unit had to contend with known forms of surveillance such as the tapping of trunk lines, and monitoring of the mail, and as yet unknown techniques such as screening for infiltrated cadres by testing incoming emergency room patients for malaria or checking for marks
In response, Esau assembled a reading list of fiction and non-fiction to complete his syllabus in secret work. In particular Esau remembered reading *The Red Orchestra* and the spy novels of John Le Carre to round out his knowledge of secret work. *The Red Orchestra* provided invaluable lessons in how to structure an underground group, while Le Carre, himself once a spy, gave the group a rich repertoire of examples of ‘tradecraft’ that could easily be translated into the Marxist-Leninist vocabulary of ‘secret work’. In an example of centering versus displacement in oral testimony, Esau vigorously maintained that they read these works strictly for content, but one could not help but notice the seepage of stylistics in the examples provided above and below. The worlds created by Le Carre and lived in by Trepper were places where the worth of an agent or cadre was based on the integrity of their ‘tradecraft’ or ‘secret work.’ Agents and cadres properly initiated into this culture of secrecy and precision talked about the quality of each others work, sometimes to the exclusion of much else. Esau clearly articulated how ‘secret work’ fit within the overall chain of cause and effect that he believed would collapse the regime. But in a condition where fiction was read as fact, and factual accounts were embroidered with fiction, one could easily see how the importance of ‘secret work’ metastasized within the imaginations of those in the underground.

from machine gun shoulder straps. The deviously imaginative techniques could travel from counter-insurgency to counter-insurgency around the world. One wonders if a version of British technique of using a laundry lottery to detect explosives on the clothing of a bomber was ever employed in South Africa. While in Kimberley, a cadre’s mother told me dark stories about relatives of cadres winning a free vacations and never returning from ‘the trip.’
This was most apparent when Esau’s unit, not yet active, began to receive 'the approach' by interested parties. With a wry sense of pride, Esau discussed an ‘approach’ made at a youth camp he attended at a university in Lenasia in February 1984. Since infiltration the most pressing threat to an underground unit, such encounters were delicate affairs, full of observation, tacit knowledge, and gesture. At some point a young man approached Esau and indicated that he wanted to be in the organization. As Esau pointed out, the nuance of his phrasing allowed the approach to continue. Esau recalled “he said, ‘I didn’t say you, but that you would know people who know.” Esau instantly recognized that the man was offering him a safe way to express interest, but remain indirect enough to give both men the option to walk away. As Esau read the situation, this was an initial indication that the man was sophisticated enough to handle this kind of work. After the encounter, another member of the unit investigated this man. They asked him to do political discussions, and then waited for him to come back. Eventually they instructed the man to go to a meeting where he would finally meet his MK contact. When the man walked into the meeting he was flabbergasted to see only Esau sitting there. The man had pictured the MK contact being a taller man without a limp and there was Esau laughing at the man’s surprised look.

Following a successful ‘approach’ newly recruited cadres were then asked to conduct a series of low-level operations that served as a sort of practicum in ‘secret work.’ Core members of the unit were already in the clear by virtue of the fact that they all had known each other for a long time. But new recruits had to
cut their teeth doing propaganda work such as cutting stencils and spray painting slogans around town. These sorts of tasks could gauge the commitment and abilities of new recruits in two ways. First it tested their ability to target, plan and execute a successful operation. In terms of the practical mechanics of transporting material, orchestrating the action, and making a safe getaway, propaganda work differs only in degree from armed actions like setting a limpet mines. Second this sort of propaganda work forced the recruit to assume a significant risk for the cause. This is not altogether different than the gerontocracy of ‘The Circus’ in Le Carre, where junior agents did menial clerical duties such as receiving coded calls over dedicated lines, and perhaps graduated to the ‘lamplighters’ that arranged safe houses for debriefings, all with the intention of becoming ringmaster. Within underground units there was a clear division of labor among seasoned veterans and green recruits that mirrored ‘The Circus.’ In many ways, this ‘testing the mettle’ served the practical purpose of conscientizing the masses, but also reinforced the line between the trained and untrained within the unit. One would not want to draw a straight line between Le Carre and this sort of proving, but the way Esau positions this story within his narrative—immediately after his discussion of his new syllabus—suggests that while content certainly informed their practice, the stylistics also fed their imagination of the possibilities offered by ‘secret work.’

**That's Someone Else's Can of Worms**

About five months into my fieldwork I made contact with several former members of the Yengeni/Schreiner unit as well as one person who recruited several members into the unit. This group is unique in three respects, first they
were one of the longest surviving active underground units, second they were last in a series of major units captured in Cape Town, and their trial was the last major terrorism trial before the transition. When I made contact with Gertrude, my first interviewee from this group, I only knew the bare contours of their activities from archival research. After our interview she asked who else I might be interviewing from the unit. I told her I had contacted Chris, and would be meeting him the next day. She smiled and told me to invite him to a tea party at her house. She told me it would be a reunion of sorts, a chance for old comrades to come together and tell war stories. I mentioned this invitation about halfway through my interview with Chris. His face turned blank, he said nothing, and after a long pause continued with an entirely different tone of voice and in a completely different direction. When I returned to specific questions about the activities of others in the unit, he replied ‘that is someone else’s can of worms.’

After my ‘delivery’ of Gertrude’s invitation to tea, I attempted to discuss Giffard’s perceptions of other cadres in the unit, collect some details about specific armed operations, and get descriptions of events that might flesh out everyday life in the unit. Instead of delving into specifics, he offered up this phrase as his response. He did not evade the question, but rather gave me generalities about discussions over the practice of violence within his unit. But his initial response was not a dodge, nor was it an idle choice of phrase. It was a form of evidence. A worm is something that is reviled, feeds on dead material, and cannot live aboveground. Further, a can of worms is a tangled, unresolvable mess. This was a not-so-subtle allusion to certain details he did not want to
touch. The maddening thing for an historian working with this sort of material is that many interviewees and documents reference ‘something big,’ but cannot describe it beyond reference to generalities. This difficulty is not rendered in silences, which would leave the interviewer unaware of ‘something big,’ but they are flags to a can of worms that everyone is unwilling to open. This situation leaves an unsettling feeling in someone writing from testimony collected from these sorts of groups. It is possible to feel the outer edges of these details, but the center is out of focus, and any attempt to reproduce what cannot be seen clearly falls into speculation that drifts between the factual and the fictional. This situation not only raises the stakes in a historiographical sense, but also in an interpersonal sense.\footnote{This problem is obliquely addressed by Perrault. Leopold Trepper did cooperate with the Gestapo during his capture. He claimed that he fed them faulty information as a strategy of evading more sensitive inquiries. The issue of what he said and did not say to his interrogators is part of the reason why he had such an unstable legacy after the war, and served as justification for Perrault’s historiographical rescue attempt. Perrault, Gilles. 1969. The Red Orchestra. New York: Simon and Schuster.}

About a month later I met Brett Myrdal, the cadre who had recruited Chris while he was a student at UCT. After recruiting Chris in 1983, Myrdal left for exile after his activities in anti-conscription campaigns drew the attention of the security police. From then onward he serviced forward areas from Zimbabwe. Although Myrdal was a highly loyal cadre who received advanced training in intelligence in the Soviet Union, he eventually came to question the purpose and aims of the armed struggle he helped to direct from exile. Myrdal this crisis in conscience arrived in a specific story addressed elsewhere but at this point he had a dream. At some point during his deployment in the late 1980s, he dreamt
that he was sleeping in a bunk and awoke to find himself covered in blood. A waterfall of blood fell from the bunk above. When stood up he saw Chris bleeding with a knife stuck in his back. These three interviews illustrate a common experience in conducting these sort of interviews; I knew I was in the presence of something big, but I could not see exactly what it was.

About three months after all these conversations I found the evidence presented during their trial in the archives of the High Court. In one folder lay an unsigned confession allegedly made by Chris but written in the handwriting of his interrogator, in another folder lay a second confession signed by Chris, but prefaced with his rejection of the validity of the first confession. Not only was I the unwitting messenger of what may, or may not have been a poison pen letter, its delivery shifted the evidentiary ground beneath my feet.

Despite the fact that I collected more interviews from this group than any other group, the closer I approached the source of this submerged tension and grief, the less I seemed to know about the circumstances surrounding it, and what I thought I knew started to fall apart. The court record gave the usual litany of details rendered in evidence presented to the court; notes decoded from microfilm sealed behind postage stamps, photocopied instruction manuals on building bucket bombs, ciphers and code words to be used over tapped phone lines, photographs of typewriters, books, and weapons seized at a residence, charts and graphs on official statistics on terrorism, and the list of charges of known crimes presented by the state during the arraignment. Nothing in the
written record filled the gap between the two written confessions and nothing in
the oral record filled the gap in between testimonies.\(^{344}\)

My interviewees left a good deal of the events of their experiences, and
their conflicted subsequent interpretations of these events in the margins of their
composed testimonies. What they did provide, and provided in great detail, was
the outlines of the practice of underground work, on both the political and military
sides of their unusually structured unit. The Yengeni/Schreiner unit was unique
in that it was an Area Politico-Military Committee, or APC, which integrated both
military and political branches into a single cellular structure. This is significant
because interviewees had a much broader view of a wider range of activities
than cadres in other units divided by distinct parallel lines of military and political
structures. So while no one wanted to touch the ‘can of worms’ of a narrative
account implicating individuals in the rise and fall of the unit, many opted to
comment on the practice of underground work. This sort testimony is invaluable
for breathing life into the thin litany of factual details and chronologies provided in
court records. Prosecutions establish the facts of a crime and build a case for
conviction, but an extended dialogue on practice, free from the adversarial

\(^{344}\) As best as I can tell the ‘can of worms’ that no one wants to open relates to the circumstances
leading to the arrest and interrogation of the unit. The unit collapsed after Tony Yengeni made a
telephone call from a public phone next to the tennis courts on the UCT campus and was
apprehended by police waiting nearby. Part of the problem of writing about everyday life in this
unit, and so many others, relates to the unknown circumstances of arrests. How did someone
know that Yengeni would be making a call at that place at that time? Were the trunk lines
monitored? Had the police trailed him? Was he set up? Did he make a mistake on his own?
These questions are the stuff of a contentious sort of ‘jailhouse forensics’ that can go on in
conversations and in the minds of individuals long after their release. This phenomenon is ever-
present in testimony about many other units.
constraints of the courtroom and legal rules of evidence provides a fuller picture of what the underground meant to those who worked within it.

This dialogue on the practice of underground work also captures a very important moment in the history of the underground in Cape Town in the 1980s. As noted above, after 1985 the total number of armed operations within South Africa increased dramatically. This quantitative increase coincided with a qualitative decline. Not only were the armed actions after 1985 smaller in scale and more modest in aims, the selection of targets suggested a lack of theoretical clarity. As the struggle lurched toward the negotiating table, and away from the seizure of power, what was the purpose of the underground? Several former cadres characterized certain armed operations as retributive—born of anger over cross-border raids and assassinations, rather than some clearly articulated strategic objective.

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345 Figures for acts of terrorism abound but are not comprehensive for the entire decade of the 1980s. Pieces of these statistics appear in "Terrorism in die RSA" a table presented as evidence presented during the Yengeni trial, also in Tom Lodge's compilation of statistics from the early 1980s, and can be sourced from printouts of police statistics held in the Carter Karis collection at the University of Witwatersrand.

346 Although several groups representing business interests and the government made overtures to the ANC-in-exile beginning in the mid-1980s, the degree to which these overtures were known and discussed in the ranks of MK is an open question. Certainly those closely following events on the ground had a sense that the armed struggle was in question. The only documentary evidence of a high ranking leader 'breaking the news' is a report from 1989. This document details a vitriolic meeting held in Zambia in 1989, where the author of the report, Ronnie Kasrils, noted that cadres expressed severe anger that they had not been consulted during negotiations and that deployments were few and far between. The report also reveals that cadres had already been disarmed and were complaining about their lack of security in the townships around Lusaka. Kasrils, Ronnie. 1989. Report from Women's Day Meeting at Kaunda Square, August 9, 1989. Carter Karis Collection. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.

347 Mohlale notes this in his interview with author. "Hitting back" is a constant theme in critiques of the militarism inherent in the way that military structures implemented armed struggle. The most vocal critic of this militarist tendency, and the negative impact 'hitting back' had on long-term political mobilization is Mac Maharaj. A range of interviews done by Howard Barrell address this issue, and the dynamics of retributive violence versus political mobilization is a major theme of Padraig O'Malley and Mac Maharaj's new book Shades of Difference.
as ‘hitting back.’ Did cadres within the Yengeni/Schreiner unit see their practice of underground work as synonymous with ‘hitting back’? If so, how did they rationalize this with the sort of proscribed and historicist readings of revolution contained in MCW?

Alan Feldman offers one way of framing this complex field of evidence in his brilliant ethnography of violence during The Troubles in Belfast. Feldman delineates different ethics of violence according to two local categories placed in historical succession; the hardman--old-style toughs beholden to a code of honor bound with ideas of fairness and proper conduct--and the gunman--no-holds-barred killers whose political objectives override socially-accepted expectations of decorum and restraint. Among the many distinctions listed by Feldman, one of the most important is his concept of techno-ethical opposition, which he defines as ‘the distinction between violence as a performative component of an individual agent and violence as a mechanized component of the gun, in which the human bodies at both ends of the instrument fulfill purely transitive functions’. Here Feldman uses a techno-ethical opposition to draw out a rubric that distinguishes the individualized violence practiced by hardmen, against the autonomous, collective violence practiced by the gunmen of the paramilitaries.

One cannot apply the same rubric to underground units in South Africa, not only because of the localized specificities of its historical succession of formations of violence, but the specific instruments used by the

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The Yengeni/Schreiner unit can reconstruct the techno-ethical oppositions in their conception of various forms of underground work. The Yengeni/Schreiner unit used four basic functions, to print and distribute propaganda leaflets, transport, stockpile and distribute firearms, ammunition, and explosives, conduct armed operation against a variety of targets, and to funnel intelligence about the political situation in the Western Cape to exile structures. The materiality of these four functions focused on three classes of instruments. The first were mechanisms for disseminating propaganda, the most spectacular mechanism was the bucket bomb, a container filled with leaflets and fitted with an explosive charge, that, when detonated dispersed its contents into the air. More commonly leaflets were simply delivered in bulk to organized protest groups who passed ‘well worn’ copies hand to hand. The second was ordinance, which comprised the materiel smuggled into the country from exile. This included firearms such as AK-47s and Makarov pistols, ammunition, or limpet mines and grenades. Evidence presented in court showed that cadres in the Yengeni/Schreiner unit stockpiled these weapons in secret caches, trained others in their use, and used them in bombings and assassination attempts. The third class is different methods of secret writing, which included invisible inks, photographic equipment used to produce microfilm, and throwaway codes. Court records featured hundreds of pages of decoded notes on intelligence collected on the organized protest groups, observations of police activities, and evaluations of individual underground cadres, all encoded onto strips of microfilm which could be hidden behind postage stamps on posted letters. Arguably the materiality of these
instruments, adapting Feldman’s terminology, the ‘leaflet man,’ the ‘ordinance man,’ or the ‘microfilm man’ is one way of decoding evidence of everyday life captured in testimony on the practice of underground work.\(^{350}\)

Chris Giffard and Max Ozinsky provided the most significant evidence of these practices. Giffard recruited Ozinsky into the Yengeni-Schreiner unit in 1986. They had met each other while students at UCT, and served in a variety of student activist groups on campus. Their first assignment was to produce printed propaganda leaflets for dissemination on the UCT campus, and deliver to organized protest groups elsewhere in Cape Town. After completing this work they were eventually given additional responsibilities. Both cadres made runs to neighboring states to deliver reports, collect cadres from exile, and transport ordinance. In addition both received ‘crash courses’ in firearms and basic MCW.\(^{351}\) However Giffard later collected intelligence on different academic units on campus, as well as learned techniques of secret communication that included the microfilm technique described above. Ozinsky moved on to the planning and execution of armed actions and provided a detailed description of an aborted attempt to place a limpet mine at a military hospital in Wynberg in July 1987. Although their narratives on practice are topical rather than chronological, their testimony details their transition from 'leaflet men' into a 'microfilm man' and an

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350 Interviewees did not use these terms to describe themselves or their work. The operative terms they would use would be political cadres involved in propaganda work and military cadres involved in military work. I adapt Feldman’s terminology not to elide their specific terminology, but because it is a useful shorthand that allows me to talk about the techno-ethical oppositions that interviewees tacitly understood but did not explicitly express.

351 Ozinsky later attended an advanced course in intelligence in Moscow after he fled for exile after the collapse of the unit in 1987. This course no doubt prepared him for his involvement in Operation Vula.
‘ordinance man’ respectively. But since both men were part of a unit that integrated political and military structures, and received ‘all round’ training, they commented on a wide range of practices beyond their ultimate areas of expertise.

What is most interesting about Giffard and Ozinsky’s testimony is that by the mid-1980s the ‘leaflet man’ did not use bucket bombs. The Rabkin unit used bucket bombs with varying degrees of success, but this heavily circumscribed group had not other method of distribution. They were ordered to steer clear of all organized protest groups, and were never given instructions to conduct armed activities. These limitations made the bucket bomb not only a practical instrument for distribution, but also a spectacle that both announced their presence and sublimated their desire for more aggressive forms of practice. Sue Rabkin noted that her unit could not remember the precise formula for the explosive charges used in bucket bombs, leading to at least one situation where the charged destroyed the leaflets it was intended to disperse. In her view, the destruction of the leaflets was regrettable, but that the explosion itself served the purpose of the operation. The means of delivery became an end in itself. A group beholded to party discipline, and circumscribed by a hostile environment, could take pride in an operation that may not have delivered its payload, but least announced their presence, and did so in a way that hinted at their capacity to do more.

What is interesting is that the ‘leaflet men’ of the Yengeni/Schreiner unit did not mention bucket bombs. The absence of bucket bombs is all the more
significant given that the state seized a detailed manual on bucket bombs after their arrest. This absence speaks to shifting definitions of underground work in the changed operational environment of the 1980s. Unlike Sue Rabkin, by the 1980s underground had a wide ranging aboveground distribution network they could rely on. They did not need to cast leaflets to the four winds, well placed individuals within organized protest groups handed their materials to readers. Further, the Yengeni/Schreiner unit, active as it was in armed actions as well as propaganda work, did not need to sublimate its desire to ‘hit back.’ After all, who needs a bucket bomb when you have limpet mines.

In an article presented as evidence during trial, and perhaps seized as evidence from a residence, Alexander Sibeko wrote in a theoretical treatise on the value of propaganda work, “a well worn leaflet passes from hand to hand and forms an invisible link between those who read it; an invisible link capable of being concretised into a material force under a given set of circumstances.”

This is what we mean by the ‘qualitative’ value of an item of propaganda, be it a leaflet, wall slogan, radio broadcast or clandestine journal.” Writing in 1977, Sibeko noted a shift that Giffard confirmed in his testimony on the mid-1980s. The materiality of the leaflet took on a greater importance given the emergence of an aboveground organized protest movement. The leaflet was the primary means that the underground vanguard gave guidance to organized protest groups. To reinforce his point Sibeko then quotes the author of another Sechaba article, “in a situation reminiscent of the terror conditions of Nazi occupied

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352 Alexander Sibeko is almost certainly the nom de plume of Ronnie Kasrils.
Europe, a single leaflet or slogan daubed on a wall brings hope and inspiration to
the oppressed and breathes defiance of the tyrant.”

So the techno-ethical opposition of the ‘leaflet men’ shifted with the renewal
of armed struggle after 1976, and the expansion of organized protest in the early
1980s, and the explosion of popular protest after 1984/85. Someone like Giffard,
who disliked guns, but saw their necessity for the struggle at large, could print
and deliver leaflets while others dealt with planning and executing armed
operations. This did not mean Giffard lacked commitment and shirked risk, many
‘leaflet men’ before him spent years in prison and even died under torture. But
after the mid-1980s there was techno-ethical opposition between what he did and
what other cadres did, even in a unit where political and military activities were
integrated.

The experience of ‘ordinance men’ also demonstrates shift in techno-ethical
opposition in the mid-1980s. Ozinsky noted that overstretched lines of
communication with the exile leadership forced units to do their own targeting
and planning. His testimony about on particular aborted operation reveals a
wealth of details about the consequences of this break in the chain of command.
In July 1987 Ozinsky was instructed to scout out targets at a military base in
Wynberg. He reconnoitered three targets within the base, a hospital, the officers’
residence, and the barracks. When he returned with this information his
commander instructed him to place limpet mines in the hospital. Ozinsky stated
that he could not do it. Ozinsky did not say he would not do it, which would have
been grounds for insubordination, but that there was a boundary that prevented
him from targeting a hospital. Although security around the base tightened, and thus prevented Ozinsky from completing this operation, he did indicate that in the interim his target had changed, he intended to place a limpet mine in the stairwell of the officers’ residence rather than the hospital. The subtext of his response to a direct order suggests that local commanders and cadres did not always share the same definition of a legitimate target. Further this seems to coincide with Len Smith’s finding, that discipline is not something that is assumed, but is negotiated in the field.353

Further, preserving the longstanding ethic of preventing civilian casualties in a time when definitions of legitimate targets expanded and contracted, meant some consideration for the technical characteristics of preferred instrument of the ‘ordinance man’—the limpet mine. Limpet mines can be detonated any number of ways, but most operations used timers for detonation. This allowed for the placement of the mine well in advance of the explosion, but also meant that the ‘ordinance man’ could not anticipate who would or would not be near the mine when it exploded. If the limpet mine was placed in a certain kind of facility,

353 Which is not to say discipline in an underground unit should be seen as identical to the French army during WWI. Smith, Leonard. 1994. Between Mutiny and Disobedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I. Princeton: Princeton University Press. In a command structure that emphasized loyalty to party line, as well as discipline, and effected its control through secrecy as much as martial authority. Much evidences shows that while underground commanders and cadres did not always agree about practice of violence, individual cadres that took a position at variance with the party line were not always successful as Ozinsky. Anne Mager elaborated on this concept by describing ‘cooking’ or ‘cooking a line.’ ‘Cooking a line’ is a sort of secret collaboration between several individuals interested in ensuring that one member accepts a particular line. It is about working a person over in successive way. Suffice to say it is not a humane practice by a legitimate authority, but a way of enforcing discipline and stamping out free thought. Rank-and-file cadres might have negotiated discipline but were bargaining from a weak position in a decidedly rigged exchange.
cadres could set the timer to detonate when few would be around, for example between trains on a train platform, or after hours at a courthouse. A reviewing the list of charges for the Yengeni/Schreiner unit reveals that that when several limpet mines were set not all detonated. Were the timers so imprecise that one could not synchronize separate explosions? If so were they so imprecise that they allowed enough time for a bomb squad to safely detonate the unexploded mines? Was this a deliberate way to demonstrate the lethal capacity of the unit, while limiting the potential for civilian casualties? Were cadres responsible for making these decisions or were these questions answered by the very the materiality of the instrument? Such questions intervene directly with Feldman’s assertion that “violence as a mechanized component of the gun.” Following this, were the human bodies at both ends of the limpet mine fulfilling purely transitive functions? Such questions of materiality and culpability have also been explored by Sharon Hutchinson among the Nuer, who considered the materiality of weapons in their designation of different categories of death and their concomitant rituals of atonement.

Ozinsky’s operation was part of a series of bombings that occurred in late July 1987. The Yengeni/Schreiner unit, calling themselves the Basil February MK Squad claimed responsibility for the attacks in a letter mailed to several newspapers. The justification for the attacks given in the letter offers a local definition of ‘hitting back’ derived from the situation in Cape Town during the late 1980s. Taking the name of Basil February, a son of Cape Town and mgwenya killed in Rhodesia during the Wankie Campaign, the authors amplified the stated
rationale for the bombings, namely that ‘we are paying our last respects to and honoring our late Commander and leader Comrade Cassius Make, Ashley Kriel and all other heroes and martyrs of the struggle.’ The bombings in late July were not ‘tit-for-tat’ attacks. These operations did not include eye-for-an-eye assassinations of prominent state agents. But the wording of the letter suggests that these operations had a retributive function beyond a clearly articulation of MCW. The targets suggest a drift away from the stated goal of attacking recognizable agents of the state. In addition to a police station, other targets included gas stations and auto repair shops, certainly not part of the repressive apparatus of the state, nor even an economic target when placed against the grand blow dealt at the Sasolburg oil storage facility in 1980. Giffard subtly registered his own unease with the wisdom of hitting targets like gas stations, while Ozinsky himself criticised this drift in a broader critique of strategy and tactics given earlier in his testimony. In Ozinsky’s view the problem of the underground during the 1980s, and perhaps the reason why the armed struggle was ultimately unsuccessful, stemmed from a profound misreading of MCW. He lamented that there was too much emphasis on armed actions for the sake of ‘hitting back’ and not enough emphasis on infiltrating, subverting and converting the repressive apparatus of the state. Military work—the penetration of the army, police, and intelligence services—was more often than not defined solely as secret work and armed actions. Regardless of its historicist foundations, MCW was an authoritative blueprint for the erosion of state power through simultaneous organization and infiltration, which had little room for ‘hitting back.’
As Bill Anderson noted, the uneven exposure to the actual text left middle cadres recruited in the late 1970s with the best definition derived from their memory of advanced training courses in the Soviet Union, rank-and-file had another version of the definition intuited from what they heard from middle cadres, while older leaders, whose training pre-dated MCW, knew little or nothing of the actual doctrine.\textsuperscript{354} All of these competing definitions were several times removed from readings of the actual text. Anderson noted that while notes were smuggled out of Soviet training facilities, these were disseminated as really bad photocopies, and were partial and also sometimes derived from memory. The process of assembling these notes into a cobbled together MCW manual did not begin until late 1988.

How was ‘hitting back’ expressed in verbatim testimony? Ozinsky gave the most cutting description of the sentiments and equivalencies behind ‘hitting back’;

Ozinsky: In a war situation, we saw ourselves as soldiers. You know, they would kill any MK cadre anywhere... The anger would build up... you know? Those were our comrades. We must do something to show that we are surviving. Because there was quite a lot of MK activity in Cape Town. So you known, you would have to one, resist that. But you also have to show the people that even though they have arrested twelve MK people that MK is still here. Within a few days there must be a retaliation there must be a response...

Davis: I remember seeing in a book of struggle art a graffito, “You ANC Nothing Yet.” Do you remember that?

Ozinsky: [laughter] Look, I must tell you if MK hit the boers anywhere in the country anywhere, anywhere, we used to literally cheer those things. We used to be very happy. Whatever the consequences

\textsuperscript{354} Bill Anderson interview with Howard Barrell, 4/8/91.
were. You know? I remember... I must tell you I was never one who was strongly opposed to necklaces and those kinds of things, to me war is war. And the masses must... this is... [in] People’s War the masses must be involved in war. You couldn’t tell people that it’s okay to shoot someone but not burn them to death. What’s the difference? In my mind... I’m not saying you must... You must hit the right targets, there is no doubt about it. You cannot just hit indiscriminately. You know if someone is a police informer or police himself or black soldiers. To me they are soldiers... it doesn’t matter... how you hit them doesn’t worry me. As long as you... I was very... I felt very strongly at the time... We were signatories to the Geneva Convention and trying to avoid civilian casualties, and all those things, there is no doubt about that. But to me there’s no difference between shooting someone and burning them... To me it doesn't make a difference.”

Here Ozinsky is drawing the techno-ethical opposition between the ‘leaflet men’ and ‘ordinance men’ within an organized underground unit, and the ‘gunmen’ and ‘necklace men’ that appeared in aboveground popular protests. There are two maneuvers at work here. Ozinsky is drawing underground and popular protest together within the broad semantic field of ‘hitting back.’ Both ‘we’ meaning those who were formal members of the ANC underground, and ‘people’ those popular protesters aligned with, but not formal members of the ANC underground, were all prosecuting the same war. But there is a profound techno-ethical difference between a ‘soldier’ in an underground unit, and the ‘someone’ who is a ‘soldier’ in the ‘army’ of the crowd. In this formulation the materiality of instrument, a gun or a petrol filled tire, matters less because the crowd can positively identify state agents. There is an intimate immediacy to shooting someone or burning someone alive. The presumption Ozinsky holds about the ‘gunman’ and the ‘necklace man’ is that since they can see their targets, and maybe even know them, they can positively identify them. Thus, the materiality of their instruments means something different and their bodies are
less transitory. This immediacy and intimacy is not part of the experience of planting a limpet mine, where the ‘ordinance man’ can only target general populations by location, rather than identifying an individual state agent by sight. Further an ‘ordinance man’ unlike a ‘gunman’ or a ‘necklace man’ and does not watch their target die. The techno-ethical distinctions between this class of instruments--guns and petrol filled tires--is markedly different than the techno-ethical concerns governing the class that includes ordinance like limpet mines.

As Ozinsky concluded, the drift from clear expressions of authorized doctrines of military and combat work became part of the justification for Operation Vula. The overstretched lines of communication between internal underground units and exiled lines of command led to the ‘rustic craftsmanship’ that distracted from the real work of undermining the repressive apparatus of the state. These distractions signaled a need for the insertion of exiled leaders who claimed ultimate authority for ‘knowing what works.’ After his departure into exile, Ozinsky was intimately involved in the planning and execution of this operation. Operation Vula was organized into several different regional commands, covering all provinces in the Republic. Although Ozinsky was deployed to the Cape, Mac Maharaj noted that planners decided to include the fledgling structure in that region. As Maharaj noted in a recent biography-autobiography, Cape Town ‘was not far enough along’ to include in Operation Vula.

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355 This operation was kept secret not only from the enemy, but also from the entire chain of command in exile. State agents had so heavily penetrated exile structures that many began to suspect that the high casualty rates were not only due to the efficiency of the state, but also because cadres within the movement betrayed a number of operations.
Conclusion

Returning to Perrault’s stark juxtaposition of different modes of writing, the written record on Max Ozinsky poses a number of provocative questions. Aside from the extensive interviews referenced above, Ozinsky appears in only two written sources. The first is the arraignment of the Yengeni/Schreiner unit delivered in the High Court in Cape Town in March 20th, 1988. Since Ozinsky evaded arrest he was not formally charged, but as this arraignment shows was known by name and deed. The second source is Operation Vula, a memoir by Connie Braam, a Dutch anti-apartheid activist. What follows is a summary of the ‘bare litany of facts’ taken from the arraignment and a paraphrased summary of a more literate description. The arraignment mentions Ozinsky in two charges;

“During August/September 1987 on the instruction of accused number one [Tony Yengeni] accused two [Jenny Schreiner] and Max Ozinsky traveled to Botswana to assist Mzwandile Vena… to enter the Republic unlawfully and to transport him to the Western Cape.”

“During the period 1986 to 1987 accused nine [Chris Giffard] received a number of draft copies of leaflets containing ANC propaganda from accused two [Jenny Schreiner]…Some of these leaflets were distributed on the campus of the University of Cape Town by accused nine [Chris Giffard] and Max Ozinsky.”

Ozinsky, like the operators of the Norwegian transmitter, was known but invisible to those hunting for him. He was also part of an ‘orchestra,’ and like the Die Rote Kapelle, this performance was eventually interrupted. Beyond this there is little evidence of experience captured in court records.

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*Operation Vula*, provides the more literary account, one that is steeped in psychological observation, convincing performance of legends, and celebrations of improvised disguises. Braam is uniquely poised to write this account, not only was she an ANC-aligned anti-apartheid activist, prior to this memoir she authored several works of historical fiction, and had extensive ties to theatre people, many of whom were recruited for Operation Vula. Likewise *Operation Vula* is a memoir of her activities as the go-between between Dutch make-up artists and costumiers as much as it is a record of the activities of the cadres themselves. Her group provided the disguises upon which underground legends were built.\(^{358}\)

Braam describes “Christopher” as “tall and slender with a pale face and a deer’s sad eyes” who nevertheless had “something strong and steadfast concealed by the frail exterior.” In a long passage, “Christopher” reveals the painful truth about his past to Braam; he lost a relationship to his rigorous devotion to the struggle, a loss which Braam represents as a noble, if psychologically costly sacrifice. In choosing to frame this sacrifice in this way, Braam taps into trope of the self-sacrificing cadre that is deeply rooted in genealogies of fictional and non-fictional writings on other struggles, particularly narratives of WWII partisans like Perrault’s *The Red Orchestra*.\(^{359}\)

\(^{358}\) Curiously Ozinsky’s face, both incognito and otherwise, graces the cover of *Operation Vula*. But Braam then conceals his identity with the pseudonym “Christopher.” Most peculiarly, Braam finally reveals his identity in the dramatis personae on the last page of her book.

\(^{359}\) *Operation Vula* bears more than a passing resemblance to books like *The Red Orchestra*, Braam equated the underground in South Africa with Dutch experiences of Nazi occupation during WWII. In a telling passage she recalled how her father had hidden from the Nazis in a pit dug out under the floor. Seeking out others for her tasks, she wrote, “I had underestimated the fact that many of my generation, born as I had been under the shadow of war, were quite familiar with ideas like resistance and hiding.” The degree to which Dutch anti-apartheid activists superimposed these experiences over their understanding of the struggle in South Africa is
Here is a place to pause and reconsider Raymond Suttner’s concept of ‘rendering visible.’ Suttner's study of organizational experience seeks to ‘render visible’ those aspects of underground life that were overlooked in earlier organizational histories, namely gender relations, romantic love and the sacrifice of the personal for the political. Elaborating on Suttner’s arguments, and pairing them the metaphors of testimony as composition, what is not “rendered visible” between the factual litany on Ozinsky and the literary account of “Christopher?” What is displaced into the margins? What is placed in plain sight of the habituated eye?

I could provide a line item comparison of these texts with my interview with Ozinsky. But all these points of interest center around one tendency in Braam’s mode of writing. Her ‘struggle history,’ written as it is in the experiential dimension, composes instances of everyday life within a heroic narrative of good and evil. Operation Vula, maligned in the media as a last-ditch communist plot to seize state power, and an operation kept secret from even the highest echelons of the leadership, is clearly an episode due for a historiographical
evident in other material. See material on AABN’s support for Radio Freedom, Karel Roskam Collection, Mayibuye Center Archives.

360 Case in point is her description of “Christopher’s” disguises. Braam describes at great length the transformations she affects on “Christopher”. She develops three personas for him, a brutishly masculine ‘Rhodie,’ a self-centered Yuppie, and a Coloured man. Although she spends the least time on the Coloured man, she revels in her construction of the ‘Rhodie’ and the Yuppie. Her description of the ‘Rhodie’ persona gives some clues to the moral calculus implicit in her mode of writing; “a Rhodie, one of those whites still reminiscing sentimentally about old Rhodesia. Rough and racist, and with a completely unfounded conviction of his own superiority which by comparison made all Africans seem the epitome of culture and refinement.” To effect this transformation Braam had “Christopher” watch “Rambo One and Two, First Blood” to “assimilate the essentials of macho-aggressive behavior.” This is an odd choice of films for developing an authentic persona, but one that draw a wide circle around who is who in the Manichean constructions of ‘struggle history.’ Braam, Connie. 2004. Operation Vula. Johannesburg: Jacana. 167.
rescue attempt. But is this mode of writing the best vehicle for rescuing these cadres from the 'condescension of posterity.' Is it not mired in the 'condescension' of eliding complexities evident in testimony the cadres themselves? Her characterization of ‘Christopher’ poses him as the sacrificial victim of a morally pure struggle. Does this characterization displace Ozinsky’s evidence of techno-ethical oppositions implicit in ‘hitting back?’ Does the gap between ‘Christopher’ and Ozinsky constitute an example of the instability of the subject? Is this instability a problem to be solved or an evidentiary effect worthy of further consideration?

Moving inquiry closer to the mechanics of writing struggle history, Braam’s text exhibits a common characteristic of this mode of writing. Rather than limiting her memoir to a first person narration, Braam tells her story in a series of dialogue between herself and cadres, and between cadres themselves. Where do these snippets of dialogue come from? Her memory? Unreferenced diaries? Out of thin air? What does this novelistic style mean in terms of the status of the text as historical evidence? Can one quote dialogue rendered as evidence?

Operation Vula is laced with the ‘now it can be told’ quality of many other struggle histories. Who is doing the telling here and what are they saying and not saying about the underground?

Whenever someone sits down to write a history of the underground, and whatever mode of writing they deploy, one must ask who gets invited to the “tea party,” why do they show up, and what do they chat about? Most often there are three kinds of guests, the ‘true believers’ who are the high priests of historicism
handed down from on high by Soviet ideologues, skeptics who took stock of 1989 and saw the underground with a greater level of complexity, and the ‘realists’ who are the post-apartheid elites who laughingly recall their misspent youth as heady Marxists. For the true believers, MCW still stands as an operable plan for revolution, for skeptics ends of social progress did not justify the means of armed struggle, and for the realists the past is another country. Testimony from each kind of guest shows evidence of displacement. This chapter hopefully begins the task of retelling the history of everyday life in the underground by curating what a prominent exile derided as ‘funny stories.’

But there is another kind of guest whose invite is either lost in the mail, or never confirms. The absence of some these interviewees speaks volumes about the socio-economic limits of the oral archive. Most interviewees referenced here successfully managed the transition. I knew they were out there, and my interviewees made every effort to put us in contact. Even when I made contact, most often I never got a meeting. Consequently I could not get access to anyone who was a cadre but was presently was down and out. The next chapter elaborates on the reasons behind these limits, and the consequences of the exclusion of some from the ‘tea party.’

I began my research into the underground with what might seem to some to be a flippant question; do underground cadres ever reach the surface? One wife of a former cadre told me about how her husband still writes down phone numbers with a deliberately altered digit—a digit he remembers to correct when dialing. Much of my evidence shows that those who performed legends in the
underground can sometimes restage them aboveground. In rarer instances they became prisoners of their legends, either typecast in the role by their adherence to historicist narratives, or unable to imagine themselves playing any other role. Connie Braam noted this trap in her account of Dutch perceptions of the underground during WWII, writing 'it was only when they had grown old, and I had grown older too, that I understood that escape and hiding go together with survival and the fear of death, and that it can be easier to go underground than to go back out into the open.'

“Blood and destruction shall be so in use
And dreadful objects so familiar
That mothers shall but smile when they behold
Their infants quarter’d with the hands of war;
All pity choked with custom of fell deeds:
And Caesar’s spirit, ranging for revenge,
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines with a monarch’s voice
Cry ‘Havoc,’ and let slip the dogs of war” 362

Umshini wami mshini wami (Lead) My machine gun, my machine gun
khawuleth’umshini wami (Follower) Please bring my machine gun
Umshini wami mshini wami, My machine gun, my machine gun
khawuleth’umshini wami Please bring my machine gun
Umshini wami mshini wami, My machine gun, my machine gun
khawuleth’umshini wami Please bring my machine gun
khawuleth’umshini wami You’re pulling me back
Wen’uyang’ibambezela(Lead) My machine gun, Please bring my
umshini wami, khawuleth’umshini machine gun363
wami(Follower)

362 William Shakespeare, 1601. Julius Caesar. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 55. For a much better explanation of the proper place of dogs in recent political history in South Africa see Zubeida Jaffer’s piece in the Mail and Guardian. During the campaign for ANC president and the subsequent presidential elections Jacob Zuma was accused of rape. After a lengthy legal battle Zuma was tried and acquitted of all charges. During the trial Zuma supporters rallied outside the court in a series of mass gatherings. At several of these gatherings prominent Zuma supporters in the ANC Youth League threatened the ‘enemies’ of Zuma who they claimed had secretly orchestrated a smear campaign to prevent him from becoming the next president of South Africa. The metaphor of dogs in the quote above was used to describe the ‘secret enemies’ that supposedly orchestrated this smear campaign. The choice of dogs as metaphors for ‘enemies’ is not accident. The phrase ‘uvath’ inja,’ in Nguni languages literally means to hit the dog, but is an idiom for severe anger. The quote provided by Njabulo Ndebele is a play on Jacob Zuma’s campaign song, “Awuleth’ Mshini Wami” (Get My Machine Gun) which was adapted from a song sung by MK cadres in training camps in Angola. The title of the song is also the refrain, a not-so-subtle historical reference to the armed struggle, now adapted to both brandish Zuma’s credentials as a former MK cadre, and a warning to his ‘enemies’.

“[You] should hit dogs very hard to force their owner and handler to come out in the open.  

Awuleth’inja yami
Uthath’umshini wakho
Ngiyayithand’inja yami
Thath’umshini wakho, bo
Ngiyayithand’inja yami

Bring me my dog
Take your machine gun away
I love my dog
Take your machine gun away
I love my dog

The Problem of the National Idea

The quotes above demonstrate the tension that developed within South African society ten years after first democratic elections. It is within this tense atmosphere that debates over monumentalization, memorialization, militarism and the proper place of MK in the history of armed struggle are now occurring. This sort of tension affects the tenor of this debate, and speaks to a much deeper problem lying just underneath the surface of post-apartheid South Africa. As many are beginning to say, the honeymoon is over. What is getting remembered, misremembered, forgotten and suppressed is all part of the problem of the image of MK, monuments, memorials, and the national idea.

When discussing the national idea, there is a temptation to call MK a lacuna in the public representations of the armed struggle. The problem with the word lacuna, is that, while it might be a fashionable term, it really does not capture the peculiar way national idea reproduces the history of MK through monuments.

Lacuna means an absence, but MK is present in the public sphere, in debates

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364 Zizi Kodwa uttered this phrase during a speech to supporters of Jacob Zuma protesting his trial on charges of rape in 2006. At the time Kodwa was spokesperson for the ANC Youth League. Whether he was speaking in his official capacity is up to him to decide.

over monumentalization, and is thick in the air of the oral testimonies given by a variety of interviewees. But at the same time it is suppressed. One reason why MK and the armed struggle has such a spectral quality is that these images are part of really crass electioneering and the shell game of post-apartheid economics. The ANC needs the image of the “freedom fighter” to maintain its credibility among its constituents during election years. The party conjures images of the ‘freedom fighter’ to show audiences that it is still fighting, albeit on a figurative social terrain, rather than literal military terrain. But the ANC also needs to maintain foreign direct investment and the appearance of respect for private property rights. So just as the party summons the image of the ‘freedom fighter’ during election campaigns, it exorcises him from the public sphere during G7 meetings. But this cynical game is really only a surface treatment of something more fundamental. The problem of representing MK is rooted in the national idea. This national idea extends much deeper into enduring state ideologies merged with liberation politics, all of which are reproduced in monuments to struggle heroes. The big unanswered question is how does MK fit into all of this?

The literature on German nationalism, counter-intuitively to some, commonsensical to others, is a good place to start. Nietzsche’s ascerbic critique of German nationalism comprises the most suppressed or overlooked passages in his oeuvre, passed over by fascists who did not want it to disrupt their
narrative, passed over by academics in search of a pithy bit of theory.\textsuperscript{366} Even a casual reading of Nietzsche’s writings on nationalism leaves no room for ambiguity. Meineke sadly continued his critique of German nationalism after 1945.\textsuperscript{367} Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson plumbed the depths of nationalism around the world and over the longue durée and all provide far reaching overviews printed and reprinted in countless editions.\textsuperscript{368} All five scholars touch on nationalism in general and German nationalism in particular, in different but related ways.

But it is Nietzsche who set the terms of debate over nationalism in Germany, and, perhaps, the national idea in South Africa. His writing on nationalism was not his most profound philosophy, rather it is a journalistic comment on cultural decline and politics at a time when Prussia gobbled up princely states and forged an authoritarian regime with a liberal parliamentary face. For all his anti-democratic loathing of the herd mentality, Nietzsche had a point to make about German nationalism and nationalisms elsewhere. That point is, when nationalism is deconstructed its self-contradictory meanings bear themselves out for all to see. The casual similarities between 19th century Germany and late 20th to early 21st century South Africa are somewhat telling; the melding of Bantustans into a new South African Republic, a state legislated


\textsuperscript{367} Meineke, Friedrich. 1946. \textit{The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections}. New York: Beacon Press.

by a de-facto one-party state, the merging of NP with ANC, and, most importantly, the creation of a new national idea inverted from the original article.\textsuperscript{369} But Nietzsche’s critique goes beyond all these surface similarities, he also wrote about the mischievous way nationalism constitutes itself, which was in his day bound with kultur and wrought with blood and iron.

It is not a perfect fit, for sure, but the literature on German nationalism, particularly on cultural assertion and nation building in 19th century, offers a lot of pathways into understanding the way the history of armed struggle is refashioned by the post-apartheid state in the 21st century and the place of this history in the national idea. The recent rediscovery of the national idea has inverted the old definitions of political subjectivity ordained and insured by new affiliations. It is turning the nation on its head. The rhetorical refrain echoes off of many walls; if you built the Taal Monument, so we should have school instruction, road signs, and tax forms in our languages. If you got a welfare state so we should get \textit{inkamkam}. If you were given status in society after being the objects of “poor whitism,” so too should we given status in society after being the objects of the “swart gevaar.” Some are easy changes and entirely justifiable, some changes are overdue but more costly, and most are beneficial assertions of cultural pride and demands for state resources by specific categories of new citizens. But there is a dark side to every national idea. If you thought of yourselves as blond beasts of the veldt, then we should think of ourselves as black beasts of the

\textsuperscript{369} The past ten years have witnessed the new national idea dressed in different garb: the African Renaissance put forward by Thabo Mbeki and the African populism engineered by Jacob Zuma. Although it is outside the scope of this dissertation to take each on its own terms, substantial evidence suggest that the new national idea, in either guise, fails to transcend original national idea in South Africa.
townships, if you monopolized the civil service, so should we monopolize the civil service. At one party I attended, a MK veteran told all in attendance an account of the happenings at Polokwane, relayed in both Xhosa and English. He ended this account, in English, by talking about a black Broederbund. I have no evidence such an organization exists. Further, pre-transition civil servants who fell under the Sunset Clause are rapidly approaching retirement. New hiring priorities have largely excluded their children and grandchildren from the civil service.

Most dangerous of all is the survival of military residue; the national vanity of purchasing expensive weapons systems during a time of financial austerity, flippant calls to save the nation by calling out the army to combat civil unrest or to combat crime, a not-so-quiet but creeping nostalgia for armed struggle.

German scholars and scholars of other nationalisms are not alone in their critiques of this political phenomenon. Kwame Anthony Appiah put forward one possible resolution to this globally-distributed ideology. In a book written for a popular audience, Appiah resuscitated the word “cosmopolitan” from its elitist gloss. He returned cosmopolitanism to its original meaning, the meaning that Herder first articulated; an appreciation for different languages, cultures, and mentalities. But he pressed on further than Herder. Cosmopolitanism, countering this current wave of nationalism, is about a peaceful dialogue between peoples. This idea has applications worldwide but his critique can easily be applied to the national idea in South Africa.

Where is the cosmopolitan culture that garlanded the first elections? Where were the cosmopolitans when certain members of the media and certain quarters of government perpetrated a semantic shift that turned legitimate immigrants and

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370 At one party I attended, a MK veteran told all in attendance an account of the happenings at Polokwane, relayed in both Xhosa and English. He ended this account, in English, by talking about a black Broederbund. I have no evidence such an organization exists. Further, pre-transition civil servants who fell under the Sunset Clause are rapidly approaching retirement. New hiring priorities have largely excluded their children and grandchildren from the civil service.

asylum seekers into “refugees” in their adopted home? During the anti-foreigner pogroms of 2008 two of my interviewees passionately and angrily critiqued xenophobia by invoking their memories of the enormous sacrifices endured by ordinary Angolans when the MPLA government harbored MK in Angola. The sentiment they expressed was an inversion of OR Tambo’s speech at the beginning of a counter-insurgency campaign fought by MK against UNITA on behalf of the Angolan people. It was reported that Tambo addressed his detachments in late 1983 prior to deploying them into battle. He reportedly told them that “they [the Angolan people] bled for us, it is time we [MK] bleed a little for them.” This statement has a variety of meanings within the historiography on exile. But in terms of the resurfacing of national idea and xenophobic riots that followed the quote can be inverted and turned inside out; “if we bled for them then, why do others make them bleed now?” A new national idea has been unearthed and it lies underneath all sorts of political language. In many ways, it is the same old repertoire of nationalist ideas laid bear by the erosion of African soil.

Disinterred Inscriptions

Where do you locate armed struggle in the substrate left by the status quo ante? Among its many other activities, the post-apartheid state is very concerned

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372 The accepted theory about the pogroms stated by one prominent parliamentarian was that a mysterious group of agitators provoked and prolonged the violence. The implication was that this was some sort of continued Third Force campaign, drawing parallels with earlier instances of Inkatha-instigated violence on the Rand. When pressed for evidence of these accusations this person cited classified intelligence reports. Field notes.

with how to construct new monuments that express a refashioned, state-sanctioned national idea, but suppress the contradictions inherent in the armed struggle. How does a ruling party claim legitimacy from a purportedly victorious liberation struggle that included a less than victorious army? How do you deploy the image of MK but not “let slip the dogs of war?”

These questions address more than who is, and who is not, a part of the South African nation. It is about how nationalism is constituted through state monuments and private counter-monuments, and how people constitute their own memorials apart from the state-sanctioned national monumentalism. There are many definitions of nationalism. For the purposes of this chapter I use Eric Hobsbawm’s definition, which is not a definition at all but a declaration of agnosticism about such a definition. Instead of fixing all the varieties of nationalism into one mould, Hobsbawm distinguishes between how ordinary people conceive of common identity, and the appearance of “spokesmen” for some national idea. The national idea, as it is deployed by Hobsbawm, is a proper noun which seems to mean the collective consciousness, and negotiated definitions, that map the imagined topography of a given nation at a given time and place. As noted above he sustains the argument that the state usually does most of the surveying in this ideological cartography. Militarism encompasses a more narrow set of definitions, but for this chapter I will just use the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition; militarism is the belief or desire of a

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government or people that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests. Monumentalization is a word coined to describe the construction of massive physical structures that express a state-centric ideological and historical narratives. These can be monuments, museums, or other kinds of physical structures like amphitheatres. Memorialization is a more personal form of remembrance that encompasses a variety of ritual practices, ranging from private archival collections to creative works such as novels and oral testimony. Any combination of these definitions can be found in the rich literature on monuments and memorials in South Africa. In a variety of ways all these authors make cogent arguments about monuments; they are not mere tourist sites for foreign and domestic visitors, they are the infrastructure of official culture, the thresholds of governmentality, and the asphyxiating language of officialdom.

Militarism is ingrained in South African society. Unfortunately South Africa is not alone in this respect, and does not deserve special scorn for its militarism, but it is important to understand this militarism using locally specific categories and ideas. I do not put much credence in the concept of a national character,

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but I certainly agree with others that state monumentalization and public
spectacles reinforce enduring mentalities, however scattered those mentalities
might sometimes be.\textsuperscript{379} The South African variant of militarism supplies a
repertoire of sentiments expressed by the national idea, and writ large in old
monuments and stored in the archive of military objects that dot the landscape.
The “dreadful objects so familiar” are too many to count. Here is a list from my
field notes; most of which I saw and some I heard about or read about. Roadside
sniper towers on the N1 through Lenasia, anti-rocket fences surrounding oil
storage facilities in Durban, blockhouses up and down the rail lines and N1 in the
Karoo, houses built for UNITA janissaries and 32 Battalion soldiers in Pomfret
now slated to become ghost towns, the scopic centerpiece of Cape Town is a
colonial Castle, Republican artillery batteries carved into the koppies that ring
Pretoria, security fences separating the Republic of South Africa from
Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana, canals that double as defensive
trenches along Liesbeeck Parkway, military logistics depots in Ottery, well placed
to blockade highways during civil unrest, perhaps the most confusing university
campus in the world, located in Bellville, and rumored to have been designed to
be impervious to student sit-ins, British ration cans and shell casings oxidizing in
the veldts of the Free State, Zulu ‘cultural weapons’ checked into airline
baggage, Impala fighter jets mounted across the street from Toyota dealerships
in Bloemfontein, once-beige hippos now freshly painted blue and white and
rolling past the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, old SADF uniforms for sale in

\textsuperscript{379} Witz, Leslie. 2003. \textit{Apartheid’s Festival: Contesting South Africa’s National Pasts.}
Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
second hand stores in Scottsville, Third Force arms caches hidden in a bunker outside Ulundi, greased up AK-47s wrapped in plastic and mothballed in the sand dunes on the Cape Flats.\textsuperscript{380} And on, and on, and on. The point is one cannot escape any of this residue.\textsuperscript{381} In a more hyperbolic figure of speech, one might say every inch of ground is metaphorically saturated with the blood, grease and rust of countless wars and countless waves of armament and disarmament. Each layer of this history left a particular, historically-specific record; frontier wars, anti-imperial wars, the aerial bombardment of class struggle, the aerial bombardment of religious revivals, violent forced removals, counter-insurgency campaigns, ethnic proxy wars, dirty wars conducted by a mysterious Third Force, and, of course, armed propaganda. All that is left are distinctly marked artifacts. How do you excavate these frequently disturbed layers of historical sediment? What is the proper way to read this mixed up strata in the present? How does this littered landscape effect perceptions of the recent past, and visions of the not-to-distant future? What are the truth-effects of this kind of archive?

Important as these issues might be for other studies, they are too broad and too numerous for this chapter. And almost everyone now accepts that historians make lousy futurists.\textsuperscript{382} But the truth-effects of this archive of military objects and state monuments have an impact on the way the post-apartheid state conceives

\textsuperscript{380} Sections of the fence that separated the Republic from neighboring states have been removed to create the world’s largest transnational game park. In my view this is a very heartening development.

\textsuperscript{381} This archive even extends into conventions of time keeping. Most cellphones and logbooks in South Africa record time using the 24 hour clock format, known elsewhere in the English-speaking world as military time.

and constructs its post-apartheid monuments in the present. However much it purports to have transcended the past, the post-apartheid state struggles to speak without using the vocabulary of ideas left by the apartheid regime. The state reverses the valence of these terms, but the terms of debate were set long ago. This linguistic dilemma means that monumentalism in South Africa will always be a conversation with the apartheid past, spoken in the deadened voice of officialdom.

As noted above, historians living and working in South Africa have made the most sophisticated advances in the study of monuments, language, and history there. I follow their lead, but look at only one specific category of monuments, artifacts, and displays. The purpose of this brief inquiry is to discover the relationship between MK and post-apartheid monumentalization, and how personal memorialization provides an alternative means of representing this recent past. All of these issues are part of a larger critique of the national idea. Although not narrative history itself, I look at the way monuments narrate the past in the present, and what other ways of narrating might say about nationhood.

Returning to the question at hand; where does MK fit in all this? Based on my field notes and the available oral and written evidence it is a very tricky fit. If Freedom Park is any measure, MK doesn’t appear as a category above and beyond the general category of “struggle heroes” and it certainly does not appear as part of the genealogy of SADF veterans, despite the fact it is featured in a
collection in the South African National Museum of Military History. Is this problem of representation worth solving? Is the solution a matter of mere quantity or quality? Or is something more fundamental going wrong here? Simply put, MK is the third rail of politics in contemporary South Africa. Everyone has an opinion about them, no one knows quite what to do about them, and in the end the initiative is ceded to others. This abdication of initiative permits political entrepreneurs to co-opt images of MK. It seems the only people who want to touch MK are those seeking power.

Part of the problem is that MK, as a particular kind of fighting force, defies any easy categorization. Is it a Fanonesque anti-colonial army seeking cathartic violence, detachments of partisans modeled on heroic images of anti-fascist resistance in Europe, a standing army-in-waiting perpetually stuck in exile, a counter-insurgency proxy army, a reservoir of constituents used by exiles to launch their post-negotiation political careers, an epiphenomenal bluff that fell out of prolonged misreading of Marxist theory, the casualties of an under-resourced and under-appreciated political underground, cruel bands of bloodthirsty murderers, rapists and brigands, a vital complement to the peace keeping force that protected the first elections, disciplined and conscientized guerrillas whose guns pour out from the barrel of politics? These categories are debated and

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383 The MK collection is set apart from the SADF veterans, and is dwarfed by collections of military artifacts from other countries. More floor space is devoted to Luftwaffe jets than liberation movement armies, much to consternation of one party archivist who visited the museum with me. But Andrew Masondo, once the National Commissar of MK, is the namesake of the refurbished library beside the museum. Yet a search of the catalog reveals only five or six news clippings on Masondo—this in library that bears his name!

384 Thabo Mbeki often used the call to arms “A Luta Continua” to conclude campaign speeches addressing problems with service delivery. Jacob Zuma supporters often brandished home-made toy AK-47s at election rallies.
debated and are still unresolved. The handful of MK monuments and collections that now exist bear a few marks of this indecision. Most collections are notable for the way they are not marked. Several museums decontextualized their displayed collections of MK weapons, uniforms, and printed propaganda.\textsuperscript{385} It is as if it is enough to get the artifacts into a glass case, but curation is avoided, leaving museum visitors a bit clueless as to why they are seeing what they are seeing and what this display means in the broader scheme of things. If no one knows precisely what these artifacts mean, political entrepreneurs certainly have a few ideas that they would be all too happy to share.

The process of the contextualization of MK within military monuments is, to some degree, befogged by the dilemma of comparative history. Despite the assumptions of most of the public, a better part of the academy, and my own early expectations, South Africa is not Zimbabwe. More importantly, we cannot understand the monumentalization of MK through the lens of Heroes’ Acre. But the literature on Zimbabwe does present a number of provocative theses on the way war veterans, and their erstwhile representatives, make claims on state resources and power. This literature does not draw comparisons, nor would I use it to do a quick line-item of similarities, but it does inform much of my thinking on language and the politics of monumentalization.

Political catastrophies come in many forms, express themselves in historically contingent vocabularies, and offer unstable, ever-shifting meanings.

\textsuperscript{385} The complexity of editorial instructions at the Electronic Thesis and Dissertations department prevented me from submitting photos of exhibits prior to the submission deadline. Future versions of this dissertation will include several photos from these exhibits.
Not only are these vocabularies historically contingent but they are locally situated. Further, southern Africa is a notoriously un-homogenous, poly-lingual zone. South Africa, is, like it or not, an exceptional state within this exceptional region in Africa. The trap is in thinking, in shades of hope or dread, that if it happened in Zimbabwe it can happen there. All this kind of thinking is not new, but it dies a hard death. It is part of a long genealogy of neurotic hand-wrangling born from entirely noble intentions and rank Afro-pessimism. These are the implicit and explicit rhetorical questions posed in sophisticated and unsophisticated ways by this literature; will South Africa turn into a political basket-case like the rest of the continent? Who is going to be thrown into the sea? Who is going to be pushed back into Africa? Will current government steer the country onto the rocks? Is the genocidal impulse still in the cards?387

These subconscious anxieties and unfulfilled dream-wishes are still present and alive in the public sphere, despite the fact that the predictive power of academic history and investigative journalism has fallen on hard times in the latter half of the 20th century. The biggest point to draw from all this is not some sort of dire jeremiad about the future, or to retread some stereotypically American pessimism about African states and African societies, but to note that all

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386 Is a South African SDU of the 1980s the same as a Zimbabwean “war veteran” of the 1980s? Is a Zimbabwean “war veteran” of the 1980s the same as a Zimbabwean “war veteran” of the 1990s? Is a MK veteran of the 2000s the same as a Zimbabwean “war veteran” of the 2000s?

veterans, everywhere, craft narratives about the past using historically contingent vocabularies to make claims on state resources and power.\textsuperscript{388} Despite these shared characteristics, the genres of storytelling and the languages used to tell stories are locally specific, and the use of one genre or language over another genre or language is dependent on very specific contexts. As Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Norma Krieger point out, these narratives vary in quality and in intent; some are maudlin, some are threatening, and some are deeply compelling.\textsuperscript{389} Further, once they are out there, they can be misinterpreted in any number of ways for any number of reasons by any number of actors. The Under 35s and the SDUs who want integration into SANDF and compensation tell particular kinds of stories. Exiles tell very particular kinds of stories.\textsuperscript{390} As chapter two demonstrated, mgwenyas tell war stories in a certain kind of way. The rhetorical questions implicit in these stories are numerous; are the youths who fought running battles in the townships part of MK? Are the couriers who ferried arms and people into the country part of MK? Is the mother who harbored her deceased son, a cadre, now part of MK?\textsuperscript{391} None of these

\begin{footnotes}


\footnote{Bernstein, Hilda. 1994. \textit{The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans}. Johannesburg: Jonathan Cape.}

\footnote{[Anonymized 3] interview with author, 12/15/07. [Anonymized 3] interview with author, 12/29/07.}
\end{footnotes}
questions are answered yet, but many people hang on the day when they are.
More to the point; how stories are crafted are ways of expressing and negotiating
contentious issues like bounding and collective rights. This mantra has become
a shibboleth in certain circles but it bears repeating; one cannot extract pure
history from these kinds of residues. My evidence is a composite; riven with
folds and contradictions. One cannot carve grand narrative arcs bridging the
past, present, and future of different places out of this kind of evidence.

This is the real dangerous question about the meaning of these narratives;
are they veterans now? If so, what kind of compensation do they want or
deserve? I will address these questions later, but to start with they are both
intimately linked to a set of deeper conceptual questions; what kind of war was
the armed struggle? It was not quite a counter-insurgency like Malaya
Emergency, or the Kenya Emergency, villagization occurred in the Eastern Cape
but for non-military reasons,392 there were no rehabilitation camps unless you
count Robben Island or Vlakplaas as one,393 and the ‘hearts and minds’
campaign really did not begin until Botha’s ‘reforms’ in the early 1980s.394 It was
not a full-blown rural guerrilla war like the Rhodesian Bush War, although Martin
Legassick makes many persuasive points about exiles’ obsession with focoist


393 Buntman, Fran. 2003. Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid. New York:

394 Nasson, Bill and Dan O’Meara. 1991. All Here and Now Black Politics in South Africa in the
1980s. Cape Town: David Philip.
theory and the rural option.\textsuperscript{395} Even in its most urban manifestation the armed struggle was not at all like the ultra-leftist urban guerrilla warfare practiced by the Baader-Meinhof Gang.\textsuperscript{396} The armed struggle was certainly not a conventional war, however much rhetorical weight people may place on the battle of Cuito Cuanavale.\textsuperscript{397} Even though a few MK soldiers participated in this battle one can easily make the argument that it was a mere sideshow to the epic drama staged within South Africa.\textsuperscript{398} Still, television documentaries and newspaper articles continue to suggest that it is was the pivotal moment of the Angolan war and the tipping point for negotiations in South Africa.\textsuperscript{399}

\textsuperscript{395} Sue Rabkin, and others confirmed many of Legassick’s arguments in their regrets about the Ingwavuma operation. A significant minority felt this attempt at creating a rural liberated zone pointed to the missed opportunity of the armed struggle. My own reading of the Ingwavuma diary suggests a much more pessimistic story about the possibilities of rural guerrilla warfare in South Africa.

\textsuperscript{396} Aust, Stefan. 1987. \textit{The Baader Meinhof Group: The Inside Story of a Phenomenon}. London: The Bodley Head Ltd. Although fantasies about the possibilities of urban guerrilla warfare abounded within the underground in the 1980s, MK operatives directly involved in urban guerrilla warfare describe their activities in a much more staid way. Some operatives trained in the East Germany and Soviet Union in the late 1970s and 1980s suggested a strategic adherence to Military and Combat Work, which was the standard-issue Soviet operations manual for underground work, which called for, among other things, a very systematic, disciplined cell structure which formed a larger underground network that seeded the populace with propaganda and infiltrated the police and armed forces. Others operatives suggest that the underground was most successful when it ignored these textbooks. Rabkin interview with author, 5/12/08.

\textsuperscript{397} Ronnie Kasrils and Chester Crocker reiterated this battle-centric view at a conference on the liberation struggle at Rhodes University in 2008. Pat Rickets, an MK cadre turned tour operator currently runs tours from the Western Cape to Southern Angola. The pivotal point of the tour is the visit to Cuito Cuanavale.

\textsuperscript{398} Vladimir Shubin vigorously disagrees with this assertion in his piece “Beyond Fairy Tales.”

\textsuperscript{399} Bongani Jonas, an MK cadre active in both Angola and Cape Town saw this cascade but gave a different causal chain, beginning with Resolution 435. Bongani Jonas interview with author, 7/11/06. Two MK veterans now operate commercial caravan tours to the Cuito Cuanavale. The battle-centric view holds that the defeat of SADF at Cuito Cuanavale, and MK’s contribution to that defeat, was the catalyst that set off a cascade of geopolitical changes that forced the apartheid state to negotiate. Resolution 435, which began the process of removing both the Cuban and South African contingents in the Angolan Civil War, was a direct result of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale.
certain places the armed struggle seemed like a civil war.⁴⁰⁰ The armed struggle was much closer to the Troubles in Ireland than many might think.⁴⁰¹ Allen Feldman’s exegesis on rituals of initiation, the penal regime installed at Long Kesh, and the obsession with violence to the body speaks volumes about the armed struggle in South Africa.⁴⁰² But in my reading, the closest relative to the armed struggle was the Dirty War in Argentina, Paraguay, and Chile. This is true both in the practice of state and anti-state violence, and the public reckoning after the transition to a more open political reality. Both conflicts contain narrative tensions wound around the discovery of secrets.⁴⁰³ Even the jail diaries from these wars bear a passing resemblance.⁴⁰⁴

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⁴⁰⁰ Ben Carton wrote on a much earlier period in Zulu political history, but his theses and conclusions might also be adapted to the recent past, especially in Kwa-Zulu and Natal in the 1980s and 1990s where there were generational fights may have operated under the cover of ideology and culture. The bloody internecine warfare in KwaZulu and Natal, and the cold-blooded score-settling between comrades and chiefs it entailed, certainly points to a threading of violence that bound culture to ideology to generation. Carton, Benjamin. 2000. *Blood From Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South Africa*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.


⁴⁰² The partial rehabilitation of Jerry Adams as a viable political figure after the Belfast Agreement has a certain familiar ring to it. There is also the problem of international solidarity and exile advocacy. As many are starting to suggest about South Africa and Ireland, the flow of money between foreign donors and exiled political groups prolonged both conflicts by funding politico-military parties long after many lost most of their key constituencies. Some Bostonians still proudly display the equation 26+6=1, a unambiguous, and distinctly Irish-American call for the total territorial victory of revolutionary or republican nationalism in Ireland. Similar slogans abounded in the anti-apartheid movement on American college campuses in the 1980s and early 1990s.

⁴⁰³ The files documenting Operation Condor were found in a garage Asuncion, Paraguay, and, as South African archivists told me time and time again, a lot of important files from the previous
But there really isn’t a way to construct categories for these conflicts, they happened in different locales, they are a part of distinct genealogies of violence, and they followed very different outcomes. So what do you call people who fought in this as yet undefined armed struggle? Norma Krieger wrote persuasively about the uses and misuses of the word “veteran” in Zimbabwe. Krieger makes three points about semantics; naming one’s own group is about claim-making on state resources and power, names position oneself in the legitimating ideologies of the state, and names establish the platforms of graduated citizenship. 406 Imprecise names, imprecise memorials, and most importantly imprecise histories allow claim-making to get out of control, ideologies to run wild, and elevate grades of citizenship beyond all reason. But does writing about this semantic problem and using one term over another open a Pandora’s Box of problems? The MKMVA deploys its term ‘veteran’ to describe its membership and imbues it with a meaning that skirts the line between a non-statutory guerrilla army of a defunct exile apparatus and a

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404 Reading Jacobo Timerman’s *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* next to Albie Sachs’ *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* resonates both texts with a same-sounding narrative.


statutory force with expectations of state compensation. But the oral histories contained in the Free State Veterans and Stalwarts Oral History Project collection show that not all agree on that definition of veteran, nor see themselves as veterans at all, or even want to be part of the MKMVA. Still there is an overall desire for acknowledgement. Some want monetary compensation, others want public recognition, others simply want to deposit their oral histories in archives and then be left alone, a few simply want to be left alone.

Semantics is the tracer dye that lights up the contours of these arguments about naming. For the purposes of this chapter I occasionally use the term veteran as a short hand. I do not see the term veteran as meaning only participants who engaged in regular warfare as part of a state army. I broadly define veteran as a person who engaged in violence to serve political objectives against an enemy that responded with similar violence that served different political objectives. These persons may or may not be part of a formal state, they may or may not be involved in regular warfare, and they may or may not be entitled to claims for compensation from state coffers. They may be willing or unwilling servants of someone else’s political objectives. Some of these ideas are operative in other definitions of the term veteran. My definition is designed solely for the rhetorical purposes of this dissertation.407

This dissertation advocates no partisan position on the relationship between terminology and the issue of compensation. In my view, the more pressing

407 If there ever is an agreed upon definition of veteran, hopefully it will come after a long public and private dialog among all South African citizens. In so far as I have a dog in this fight, I side with the preservation of specificity by preserving the local genealogy of these sorts of terms. Reference to genealogies outside this locality might be helpful, but ultimately South Africans must come to terms with their own history and make a term that works within the local context.
problem is purely linguistic but reveals a more practical evidentiary dilemma. My definition of ‘veteran’ runs the risk of analytic uncertainty. If political violence is the defining characteristic of a veteran then is an apolitical mercenary a veteran? Is a religious martyr a veteran? Is an unwitting accomplice to political violence a veteran? Further, is political violence always distinct from generic violence? How do you bound a study and mark off a field of evidence if you cannot define your subject? I concede all these shortcomings. In my defense, I use veteran as a short hand that encompasses a number of more precise terms like guerrillas, camp attendees, suicide squads, cadres, agents, operatives, etc. This dull imprecision in language points to a more fundamental problem; good evidence suggests that there might not be a comprehensive membership roll for MK.\(^{408}\)

So the state and ruling party may not be able to always define who was and was not a member and who is and who is not a veteran. Further complicating matters, even in the Angolan training camps cadres did not always take the MK oath, and did not necessarily join the ANC. How can you build a monument to a polysemic group of people with a fluid membership?

**Freedom Park; The Polynational War Memorial**

The story of Freedom Park is a long and sordid tale, but the short version is it was poorly planned, over budget, and it took a very long time to complete.\(^{409}\)

On the one hand this is symptomatic of a lack of planning and accountability that

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\(^{408}\) Where are the Military Headquarters archives of MK? If they exist there should be an inventory? If one is curious to find them a good person to start with would be the ANC archivist supposedly in charge of military documents. His name is Uriel Abrahamse and he works at Luthuli House.

has become depressingly predictable in public works projects in South Africa. On the other hand, these are generic failings of public works projects everywhere. Accordingly many criticisms began and ended with money and timing. But a few go deeper. A few more addressed the contentious and polemical issue of the exclusion of SADF veterans. Some attacked the deployment of bad ethnography to create a generic “African culture” that acts as palliative for painful memories. One cabinet minister at a dinner party I attended casually nicknamed it “The Temple to Wally Serote’s African Gods,” presumably a sardonic remark on the foggy origins and clumsy deployment of these cultural symbols.

However careful one is to constructively criticize this site, and whatever academic standard you might hold it up to, the fact is, for better or worse, this park will become an intensely personal place where many people will seek emotional catharsis. With this very important point acknowledged, the poor execution and flawed conceptualization of Freedom Park opens the entire project up to a series of cheap and not-so-cheap shots. So, in some ways Freedom Park has already been shamed and it is not necessary or productive to revisit those valid and invalid criticisms again. The most important problem is that all of the vitriol poured over the project made an already cloistered corporate management intellectually defensive and callously indifferent. Judging by the


411 Fulbright South Africa 2007-2008 Class Official Visit to Freedom Park, field notes.

way our official tour guide, who doubles as a research assistant, fielded questions during my last visit, they certainly do not welcome criticism from visiting graduate students.413

Nevertheless, here are my critiques. They are not necessarily novel, but they are empirical. I made two field trips there to confirm or disconfirm what other people had told me about Freedom Park. In my assessment there are two levels of problems. One is at the level of conceptualization, another is at the level of execution. The following is a discussion of how these twin problems interact and interfere with the clarity of its message, and what that message says about the place of MK in recent history.

Freedom Park does invoke ideas of autochthony, and certainly cloaks these presumptions in an ethnographically-authenticated postcolonial coolness, but its design is more easily read as an articulation of the national idea. In my reading, the entire koppie, its walls, its ambulatory paths, its open air amphitheatre, is constructed, intentionally or unintentionally, as a new laager. Like all laagers, the amphitheatre is both a fortress and a theatre. As a fortress Freedom Park is under siege.414 Geographically speaking, it is surrounded by artillery batteries built by the Transvaal Republic which were intended to protect Pretoria from invasion. But its real embodied power comes from its theatrical function. The bowl made by berms around the main buildings form a performance space; the audience perched on the inner slope of a berm, below is a fountain that is

413 Fulbright South Africa 2007-2008 Class Official Visit to Freedom Park, field notes.
414 First visit to Freedom Park, field notes. John Redfern, conversation with author, field notes.
drained and transformed into a stage. The view of the audience is oriented in a specific way. As people sit on the berm, their backs are turned to the Voortrekker Monument, and they face the rostrum where the official dramaturgy is staged. If they look away from the stage they still see the Union Buildings beyond, and no doubt imagine the drama taking place in there.\textsuperscript{415}

But there is more here than dramaturgy, situated audiences and scopic regimes. Freedom Park is an ambulatory that channels visitors through designed chronologies marked with inscribed meanings. Several segments of walls display groups known casualties of wars of liberation. Each panel is engraved lists of names, and in total several hundred names of people classified and authenticated as casualties of liberation. These names are subdivided and grouped in subsections under the headings of named wars. These segments identify those who were selected as sacrificial martyrs in every war of liberation from the pre-colonial era to the liberation struggle, all listed chronologically. The emotional climax of this walk is the Sikhumbuto, a wall embedded with a series of embedded modular tiles. The Sikhumbuto is a large surface positioned at the end of the longer line of segmented walls, and displays a distinct category of people who are defined in official brochures as “those who died for liberation.” Further, this entire complex of walls is the psychic anchor that holds the entire ambulatory, and perhaps the entire park, together. Needless to say this section, with its categorization of wars, and its embedded decisions about who gets

\textsuperscript{415} For a trenchant reading of state symbols and pageantry in communist Poland, see Kubik, Jan. 1994. \textit{The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power}. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
included and who gets excluded, makes for very provocative reading material on
the national idea.

The metaphor I use to describe this complex of walls is that it is, in its
entirety, a text that contains an ideological codex drawn from the national idea.
On display for all to see are the names of those who gave their lives for the post-
apartheid era/post-apartheid condition that the liberation struggle wrought. The
groupings of the liberation wars linearly run from misty legends of pre-colonial
wars, open the colonial era with the Khoi-San killed by functionaries of the VOC,
pass through 19th century wars of resistance, splay the World Wars of the first
half of the 20th century, and end with the Sikhumbuto which brings visitors to the
end of the liberation struggle in the early 1990s. These lists of names have
predictable and unpredictable inclusions and exclusions that are, in some sense,
the cipher to the codex, promising to reveal its not-so-hidden message. The
names of Malagasy and Indonesian slaves are listed as separate category
between a set of more bounded armed conflicts. The Septembers, Februarys,
and Aprils included on this segment surely draw in their descendents but are
included as a separate category. The Mfecane is left out, so resistance to it does
not classify as a war of liberation. The Boer War is included, but under the more
inclusive name of the South African War. This inscription is silent on who
liberated whom during that war. Names of casualties from WWI and WWII are
included, but the Korean War casualties are left out. Since there are only twenty-
eight of them they are easily overlooked, and the Korean War is an ongoing UN
police action anyway. This sets aside the thorny issue of who liberated whom during that war. The largest block of names is the Sikhumbuto.

Clearly, even if one decodes parts of this codex, it reveals only bits of a garbled message. At times it seems to be a moral judgment on, and recognition of ‘good wars’ drawing equivalences between WWII and the liberation struggle, but not of ‘bad wars’ drawing equivalences between Korea and the Border War. The impression these equivalences draw is that WWII somehow fits in the same category as the liberation struggle, that they are both liberation struggles. There are any number of reasons why these are an ill-fitting pair.\textsuperscript{416} At other times the message is that this is an anti-colonial memorial, but Rhodesian casualties are listed.\textsuperscript{417} Was the Rhodesian Bush War an anti-colonial war if Rhodesia was a self-governing dominion but not a colony. That aside, what are Rhodesian casualties doing on a monument dedicated to South Africa? If Rhodesia is included, then the Border War must be also included because it too was a bush war, one that liberated Namibia from the limbo of its status as an illegal protectorate. But those casualties do not receive a section of walls.

Whatever the reasons for these inconsistencies might be, the Ur-inscription among this complex of walls is the Sikhumbuto. Accordingly, the wall of struggle heroes is where this long linear narrative comes to its chronological and spatial end. Its meaning is then revealed to the visitor. Here is where the names of

\textsuperscript{416} The difficulties of pairing WWII heroic narratives with a postwar anti-colonial nationalism are legion. Could one make a reasonable claim that Chaing Kai-shek, Subhas Chandra Bose and Sukarno were liberators? Or that liberal democracies in Western Europe did not embark on a second colonization after the war? Or that the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe created a liberated zone after the war?

\textsuperscript{417} Conversation with John Redfern, field notes.
struggle heroes are inscribed, and here is where the names of apartheid villains are not. This fine line of this distinction is the ultimate expression of the political legitimacy of a party desperate for a constituency-cohering myth. Some exclusions are not that surprising; all those killed by the liberation movement are missing, bombing victims, assassinated councilors, poisoned comrades, liquidated spies, and neutralized political rivals. Clearly, they are not part of the story of liberation. The defense offered for this exclusion is a familiar one and the same one given by the ANC during its defense submitted to the TRC. You cannot draw equivalences between the numerically larger number of deaths caused by the apartheid regime and the numerically smaller number of deaths caused by the armed struggle. To solve for this equation everyone must be placed into two neat categories; those who fought to destroy apartheid, and those who fought to uphold apartheid.

But this distinction also contains the logic of the national idea as conceived by the state. Here is how that works; the liberation movement is a reverse synecdoche, the whole for the part, so that when the liberation struggle is invoked designers really mean the ruling party. In this logic, the ruling party, for all its acknowledged faults, was and is, on balance, morally justified to assume the center stage of the new national narrative. By implication the ruling party is

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also the legitimate inheritor of the post-apartheid state. Conversely, all those complicit in the apartheid apparatus, real or imagined, whether uniformed army or police, bland Bantustan functionaries, impimpis or regular agents, people misidentified as collaborators, or innocent bystanders, are cast out of the nation as villains who, were and are on the balance, irredeemably immoral. Likewise, the perceived descendents of the apartheid apparatus are, by implication, now illegitimate political non-entities. The names of the authenticated casualties and struggle heroes are a quantitative symbolic representation of this moral calculus. Who gets on these walls and the reasons why underpin the logic of the national idea. For the liberation struggle the ends justified the means, for the apartheid state the means did not justify the ends, nor did the ends justify the means. Like it or not, this is the Manichaen black and white world of the national idea. To refashion a phrase from the title of a recent struggle biography, there are no shades of difference.

The problem of execution devastates the conceptual basis of the monument, and the problem of conceptualization devastates the execution of the park. When I conducted my first visit many of the names were incorrect or were mistakenly included.419 When I visited March of 2008, I was narrowly granted access to the site, which, was dedicated three months prior, on December 16th, 2007. When my journey along the path came to the Sikhumbuto I observed two elderly black women looking for the name of a relative, friend, or acquaintance on the Sikhumbuto. They remarked to each other as they peered over the names

419 Omar Badsha warned me about this and it was confirmed on my first visit, field notes. Omar Badsha conversation with author, field notes.
that one of the people listed was born after 1994. At the same time the management was scrambling to remove and correct a lot of names. To be fair, my tour guides noted on both occasions that the addition and correction of names was ongoing, and the verification of names was ongoing as well. In a bit of technological flourish, the guide proudly told me that plans were in the works to install computer terminals where people can access a database of names as well as submit names for verification and installation. In addition, people around the world may submit names on their website. The research staff would then do whatever it is they do to authenticate the names. I went to the website and submitted the name of a person I thought should be on the wall. I am still waiting to hear back from them.420

The interesting thing about this wall is that it does not group MK people into a category. After the initial lot of approved names, the management mounted tiles to the wall as they became authenticated. The process of mounting is ongoing, and, in theory, will never end. So unlike the Vietnam War Memorial, the names of deceased struggle heroes do not appear chronologically according to casualties listed for that day during the armed struggle. There is no finite list of casualties organized by date. Since there was no complete and thorough record keeping of casualties, like the kind that regular armies take, it is probably impossible to impose that kind of chronology over the space of the wall. Likewise, there will never be a fixed number of tiles. Instead the database silently collects submissions, files authentications in process, and returns the

420 PDF confirmation of submission of name of [Anonymized 3], 7/1/09.
coordinates of approved names. This allows relatives to locate the name of a loved one, friend, comrade, and permits new names to be added in the order of the date of authentication. So names are added in no particular thematic scheme, chronological order, or grouping other than by some combination of the time and date of their submission, authentication, fabrication and installation.

The names of struggle heroes who were members of MK are interspersed among the names of struggle heroes who were not members of MK. There is no way of telling one affiliation from another other, unless you already know who to look for and what affiliation they had. Thus they avoid the trap of Heroes Acre, and fall into a stranger predicament, that MK is dispersed within the national idea and, in some sense, anonymized by it. The Sikhumbuto, siSwati for “We Remember” is actually a place where we ‘disremember’ MK.421

421 What do you do with the veterans from the other side; the conscripts and enlisted men from SADF? How do you handle the problem of universal white conscription, and those black men who volunteered for service in SADF? Should there be a blanket dismissal of these veterans as defenders of apartheid or could they also be seen as involuntary victims of apartheid war machine? Even South African Museum of Military History has an exhibit on white male war resisters in the Congress of South Africa War Resisters (COSWAR). At the time of my visits Freedom Park had no such exhibit. What do you do with individuals who were miserable within SADF but couldn’t bear a prison sentence? One of my research assistants had a brother who left the army, was imprisoned, broke out of prison and lived on the lam for several years. The resources devoted to his capture were not spent on the border. Or were persecuted during their service for their beliefs or identity? Arguably these conscientious objectors, principled malingerers, and repeat deserters had a more direct impact on the weakening of the apartheid military machine than jet-setting exiles attending UN conferences in New York. Van der Merwe, Andre Carl. 2006. Moffie Cape Town: Pen Stock Publishing.

Periodically the pyramidal metal counter-memorial on the corner of Visagie and Potgeiter Street is moved from its location by mysterious persons. All this brings us to a very polemical question; if struggle heroes who were murderers and torturers in the liberation struggle get their names on the wall, do the murderers and torturers of the old SADF get their names on there too? Let alone the people who could not bring themselves to be conscientious objectors, or those who involuntarily participated in the apartheid war machine, but did not necessarily approve of what it defended. Some of these veterans have bad motives, some make arguments in bad faith, but a few ask some really hard questions, with noble intentions and demand good answers.
Sikhumbuto aside, the most important facility at Freedom Park is the newly constructed archive and research center. When it is fully operational it will be a history machine. It was built by a state-subsidized corporation and it serves the state by constructing and defending a certain narrative. But archives, like monuments, and, of course, public spectacles, cannot keep all their ideological contradictions together into a coherent narrative. Les Witz, riffing off of Bakhtin, persuasively argues this point in his exegesis of the Tricentennial Festival of Jan Van Riebeeck’s landing.422

Rumor has it that the OAU African Liberation Committee archives will be housed in this facility.423 Part of the ANC archives might end up there. Presumably it will house the documents that the ANC has culled. Who knows how embargoes will work and who will and will not be let in, and what sort of litmus tests their projects will have to meet? But apropos this chapter, the big unanswered question is what will happen to this mysterious Military Headquarters archive that everyone is so interested in? Despite the assumptions of party archivists that the MHQ archive holds all of the secrets of MK, if ever opened to the public, it will not provide unambiguous answers to all of the mysteries of the armed struggle. The point is that if it even exists, it will only tell part of the story, not necessarily slanted version, but a vision that is woefully


423 According to rumor the OAU Liberation Committee Archives are currently in Tanzania reportedly under the administration of General Hashim Mbita.
incomplete.\textsuperscript{424} Indications from oral histories from intelligence operatives, suggest that the Politico-Military Committee and military intelligence really had a limited vision of what happened internally and on the ground.\textsuperscript{425} “Contact reports” were difficult to keep inside the country and even more difficult to get out of the country. Camp reports from commissars or commanders in Angola were probably better. The most effective way of knowing what was going on in the country was debriefing operatives who left for exile.\textsuperscript{426} But these debriefings came with limits of perception, ulterior motives and competing claims to truth. Of the one or two security biographies of exiles out there, they are rich, but the rest will never, ever see the light of day.\textsuperscript{427} Despite the valorization of oral testimony in the SADET volumes, the written archive is still perceived to be the font of truth in official history.\textsuperscript{428}

This does not devalue all written documents. But the assumption of state historians is that truth only exists in the official written archive, which includes

\textsuperscript{424} There is a lot of doubts about record keeping in exile. Most of which are evident in the meticulously collected and voluminous Carter Karis Collection held at the Cullen Library at the University of Witwatersrand. Arguably, the thousands of fragmentary records carefully collected by Gwendolyn Carter, Tom Karis, and Gail Gerhart demonstrate the peculiar habits of when, why and how people wrote things down during the exile period. The shambolic ANC Archives at the Liberation Archive and the ANC Archives at the Mayibuye Center Archives hold more documents, but no less indicative of the haphazard record keeping during the exile period.

\textsuperscript{425} Bill Anderson interview with Howard Barrell, 4/8/91.


\textsuperscript{427} Where might these biographies be? At the National Intelligence Service? At Luthuli House? In someone’s garage? Along these same lines the archives of the South African Communist Party ‘disappeared’ a short time ago.

\textsuperscript{428} Rumors about the SADF archives employ dark allusions about closing days of apartheid regime, papers taken to be incinerated at an iron smelter outside Pretoria, dark secrets that went up in a cloud of black smoke. It makes for a good story but it presumes that redundancy did not exist. Most likely, the known fragments of this archive are waiting behind an embargo beneath the Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand.
written transcripts of state-sponsored oral history projects. If you cannot have access to these archives then you cannot have access to the truth. If you cannot have access to the truth then you are not writing history. By extension the Freedom Park Research Center will be the central reserve bank of historical truth for the liberation struggle. These archives contain state resources to be distributed as the discretion of the official bodies that oversee these materials.

Personal written archives, like desk novels, journals, and poisoned pen letters are better sources for writing this history. The jealously guarded distributed photograph archive is a deeper layer. But oral history is where different ideas about memorialization are really debated and contested. Official culture is dead and the presumptions of official historians are flawed.\textsuperscript{429} Personalized oral history is not the be all and end all of historical sources, but if you are looking for memorialization, rather than monumentalization, this is where the action is. Oral testimony is a memorial of a different sort, with access restricted to select audiences, and staged in irregular performances.\textsuperscript{430} Access to personal archives is granted differently than official archives, and not just anyone can pass by, walk in and have a look or sit and listen.\textsuperscript{431} The timing of the opening of these archives is partly based on the ritual calendar of the

\textsuperscript{429}This was apparent to all who attended the lavish book opening that celebrated a government project to restore Timbuktu archives. What, pray tell, has this to do with South Africa, other than some top-down celebration of the African Renaissance? Who can justify the state funds used produced lovely multi-color tome that a majority of South Africans could never access or own? Field notes.

\textsuperscript{430}Which, in an ironic way, is not altogether different than the ever-changing embargoes and fickle archivists that govern official documentary archives.

\textsuperscript{431}[Anonymized 6] interview with author, field notes.
archivist, partly on the way memories bubble up to the surface of consciousness, and partly when debates over recent events demand a dialog with the past.

The transition to democracy opened a contentious period in the construction of memorials in South Africa. The controversies over the Gugulethu Seven memorial and the District Six Museum are clear indications of the contentious issues that plague these projects. Both monuments are part of a much longer, story about how you represent complicated contested categories of victims and manage state compensation. Land claims on property in District Six are still unresolved, arguments over the Gugulethu Seven monument are ongoing as well. The only monument that people in Cape Town seem satisfied with is the Trojan Horse Massacre monument, an event that was recently retold a highly inventive comic book version.

Recently the minister of arts and culture lamented the expansion of state funded monuments and heritage tenders, which now amount to an unofficial form of state patronage. Museums, monuments, and history-related projects are duplicating themselves all over the country. Some closed-minded private museums will not let just anyone come in and install new exhibits on certain topics, so the government builds redundant facilities, even where existing facilities could, in theory, house more than one kind of exhibit. One could call all

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432 For more on the tense relations that govern public heritage projects and the complex economics surrounding tourism sites on the Cape Flats please see forthcoming work by Rachel Harvey.


these heritage projects, both good and bad, the monument-industrial complex. People apply for grants for heritage projects both with the idea of remembering important forgotten heroes, but also of accessing funds in an arbitrary, parsimonious and Byzantine patronage state. A good share of the funding of these heritage projects comes from public coffers, but a good share also comes from corporate sponsors who come to the table with a variety of motives and quite a bit of editorial control.\footnote{Case in point is the entire South African Democratic Education Trust, which is underwritten by a bank and a cell phone company. To what extent to these funders exert editorial control over these official narrative histories? In terms of audience, the government is both anxious and selective when “engaging” with the public on these projects.}

So if heritage projects are a calculated way for a tarnished party to buff its liberation credentials, why do ordinary people play along and try to ‘engage’ with these state projects? The answer is partly personal and partly economic. Some of the people I spoke with want to be proud of the sacrifices of their heroes, and want to leave a public record of these sacrifices.\footnote{[Anonymized 6] interview with author, field notes.} They also want to use the power and resources of the state to counter the grandeur of existing monuments built by the previous regime and install their own grandeur, albeit rendered in the post-apartheid African style. But not everyone gets tenders, and some are closed out of the kingdom of patronage entirely.

In terms of MK, heritage patronage is a sensitive issue. Exclusions from the kingdom can take several forms, tensions in the army over pay cause people to leave or worse, the Sunset Clause limits the state’s ability to provide patronage jobs, and many exiles spent too much time outside the country, and
were sometimes unable to acquire primary, secondary, or tertiary educational certificates. All these factors leave many without avenues for advancement. And of course, some MK people were lumpens to begin with, identified as such when recruited into MK, and were later determined by party minders to be too unsavory for a variety of post-transition jobs. The worst off are those veterans traumatized by the experience of exile. Some of them are traumatized to the point of being disabled by psychological and physical ailments. A lot of these problems are just par for the course; they are the consequences of endemic criminality, alcoholism, unemployment, debility, and immobility that are common features of the depressingly unequal post-apartheid condition. Nevertheless, while veterans may be a cantankerous bunch, they certainly are not stupid. This network of monumentalist patronage might look bizarre to people from countries with a more equitable distribution of wealth, but getting funding for a heritage project, particularly a tender for a monument, is widely thought of as a potential way to access state monies. MK veterans are involved in this heritage patronage at all levels government, in the private sector, and sometime in both at

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437 There have been three separate murder suicides at military bases in South Africa in the last five years.

438 Three of my interviewees exhibited symptoms of diseases either acquired during their time in MK or exacerbated by their duties in MK. One individual referenced below was a severe alcoholic. Alcoholism is by far the most common disease among these veterans. Alcoholism also appears to orbit around psychological problems which may be diagnosed by professionals as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Another individual I interviewed had severe tuberculosis which he maintained he acquired in Angola. And yet another interviewee had severe recurrent malaria. His wife told me he had a metallic odor before and during a relapse. In the 1980s hospitals in Cape Town were known to check new patients for malaria, which was one screening technique for identifying underground cadres who received training abroad. Field notes.

439 The recent looting of Robben Island its corrupt administration is but one example of how to ‘access’ state monies.
the same time. They receive both very small and very large budgets, sometime both at the same time. Who gets these tenders and why is an important part of this story but an entirely different subject.

Adriana Petryna, in her trenchant ethnography of post-Chernobyl claim-making in the Ukraine defines the process of applying for state patronage as biological citizenship, which is a way of mustering documentation to make claims about the obligation of a state to deliver medical and financial compensation. Although the circumstances are different there is a form of sacrificial citizenship—a term adapted from Petryna’s biological citizenship--evidenced in the documentation of applications for tenders. But running concurrently to these monumental applications are actual methods of memorialization, “write your own history” projects, more formal oral history projects run by universities, personal archives, video archives, and cairns in dry river beds. Sometimes the three are intertwined. Sometimes they are known only to a select few and are unavailable to the rest of the public.


441 Project tender written by [Anonymized 6], field notes.

442 The projects have been attempted by Mayibuye Center Archives at the University of the Western Cape. Various oral history projects continue to do conventional one-on-one interviews. These include ongoing projects at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town. The river that runs through Zwelithemba outside Worcester had several cairns.

443 One high ranking MK veteran who will remain nameless tried to extract R5000 rand out of me for a DVD I later found out was available for free at the NGO that produced it. This maneuver was the price of admission to his personal written archive. An admission price I never paid.
Veteran’s organizations cling to the belief that the ANC is the key to addressing their needs, both legitimate and illegitimate. If any recent stories are true, their proclaimed patrons’ might not take their grievances as seriously as they publicly projected.\textsuperscript{444} They also want other forms of recognition and compensation. What prevents this? Too complicated and too presentist to address here. More to the point is not to assume that the MKMVA represents all veterans.\textsuperscript{445} Some are members, some are sympathetic onlookers, and some are vigorous opponents of the MKMVA and its plans.\textsuperscript{446}

**Anonymity, Creativity, History**

Who builds monuments and who is authorized to create counter-memorials is a controversial subject.\textsuperscript{447} This contestation points to the fact that there is no easy way to make a physical object that convincingly memorializes the past. Monumentalization and memorialization are, in a sense, mutually exclusive things. But memorialization, like monumentalization are both locally specific methods of remembrance. Not everyone wants or needs Trafalgar Square, the Vietnam Wall, and certainly not Heroes Acre. But more successful memorials are grounded in a specific place and a specific time. My own work on the Nigerian Civil War demonstrates how the literary form of the novel became an

\textsuperscript{444} There was much talk at the ANC National Conference at Polokwane in 2007 about establishing a ministry of veterans’ affairs. About six months after Jacob Zuma took office the MKMVA head office complained that the government was spying on them.

\textsuperscript{445} The interviews contained in the Free State Stalwarts and Veterans Oral History Project represent all takes on veterans associations by veterans themselves.

\textsuperscript{446} The past five years have seen at least two schisms within the MKMVA. The press associated each break with the theft of funds devoted to self-help schemes.


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unofficial site of remembrance for Biafran partisans and for Nigeria at large, at a time when the state actively suppressed any popular recognition of the Biafran War/Nigerian Civil War. But the English-language Igbo war novel was not all about remembrance, it was more than that, it was a way of forgetting. The novelization of armed struggle has not yet occurred in South Africa but the absence of fiction doesn’t mean non-fiction isn’t there; it is in a big way. If one includes struggle biographies and autobiographies there are more books about MK than one can ever read.\textsuperscript{448} And, as Bill Nasson points out in a review of recently published struggle biographies, the line between the genre of fictive novels and non-fiction biography can be perilously thin.\textsuperscript{449} But, as one elder SACP member warned me, these books might not be best sellers, but people do read them, and veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle gobble them up.\textsuperscript{450}

The personal documentary archive, the distributed photographic archive, and post-transition oral history are where memorials are truly alive. These sources are no more factually reliable than published books and official archive, but they are replete with possibility and rich with dialog about the past. Much of this possibility and richness is due to their location beyond the heavy hand of the state. The are less an appeal to official definitions of nationalism, more about non-professional historians, sometimes working with professional historians,

\textsuperscript{448} National chain booksellers feature entire sections of shelves devoted to these biographies.


\textsuperscript{450} Early in my fieldwork an SACP stalwart related a story about MK guys showing up to book opening en masse. He described this audience as a long ‘crocodile’ of men in black leather jackets stretching around bookstore. I interpreted this story as a not-so-subtle warning about perils of writing about MK and the awareness of this audience.
sometimes working on their own, reconstructing individual lives—their own, the lives of friends and family, the lives of people they have never met but respect. Some are also a fierce critique of the state, made by “trouble makers” who refuse to accept official line. Their critiques offer sharp statements; the state that riskily prostitutes their image to legitimate itself has failed to take care of the most vulnerable and damaged among them. The more radical among them use their memorials of vulnerable and damaged veterans as metaphors for addressing the abandonment of other categories of aggrieved citizens.  

Truth be told, a few MK veterans are clear and present dangers to society. But none of the people quoted here are, and in my experience I did not meet any veterans who admitted that they were full-time criminals. The majority were people just trying to get on with their lives and trying to make ends meet. A minority were very proud of their accomplishments, a pride that sometimes lapsed into self-aggrandizement. All this points to real dangers in retelling certain compelling stories, in valorizing the entire veteran community, and, thus, activating claims on state compensation. But the real danger in retelling these

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451 Several names in this dissertation have been anonymized rather than given pseudonyms. Unless interviewees agreed to publication of their names beforehand, I will anonymize certain names. Please see the appendix below for the process by which interviewees may reveal their own names and access their own interviews. There are some in the profession who are going to take issue with this anonymization and these procedures. My answer to them is this; some of these interviewees are part of vulnerable populations that are served by capricious patrons. Elites can be a dismissive, fearful, vindictive lot. And both elites and rank-and-file, as one of wife of a cadre told me, know where the metaphorical and literal bodies are buried. I, generally speaking, do not. The exception came during my interview with Joe Seremane, brother to Kenny Mahamba, a suspected spy tortured to death in Angola. Allegedly, his grave is marked with a bottle somewhere on the grounds of a former training camp.

452 Although there were probably more than a few who supplemented their income in a variety of gray market activities including drug trafficking, theft of arms from military bases, stolen car chop shops and other unsavory pursuits. [Anonymized 7] interview with author, field notes.
stories, lies in inadvertently identifying a few of the storytellers. Little conspiracies exist, old grudges bear themselves out in unpredictable ways, and elites jealously, and sometimes violently, guard their positions. Their reluctance to talk to me was less about me being a white, ‘bourgeois,’ American male from the “Heartland of Imperialism.” This reluctance was also expressed as a concern about what I would do with this information, how I would make it public, and how I might benefit from it. Several interviewees told me in no uncertain terms; sloppily reproducing testimony comes with consequences. These consequences include disrupting the flow of state patronage. The expression loyal dissidents used to describe their experiences of these bureaucratic shenanigans was; “they are frustrating me.”

I briefly met Archie Sibeko at the Mayibuye Center Archives. He refused to give a formal interview but he did chat with me, and served me with an injunction against telling “funny stories.” His autobiography is a timid, self-edited, and didactic history that fails to document a much more complicated life. Freedom in Our Lifetime is an example of the danger of autobiographical ‘struggle history’ masquerading as history. More to the point it is an example of the danger

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453 [Anonymized 3] showed me a photograph clipped from a newspaper of him being tossed away from Thabo Mbeki by his security detail. The irony of the photograph was that the people tossing him away were more than likely MK veterans themselves.


inherent in the entire genre of “struggle history.” His stated defense for writing didactic history was that he does not want to dissuade future generations from struggling for a better life. But in the process he, and many others, ignore many of the mistakes and ambiguities of the anti-apartheid struggle. He does not do this in the stories he tells in conversation, but the way Freedom in Our Lifetime was written stripped history of all its subtlety, eloquence and humor. And “struggle history” aside, believe you me, the MK cadres who spent any significant time in Angola certainly know how to tell a good joke.

Didactic history is countered by the sophistication and brutal honesty of black humor. The beauty of [Anonymized 1]’s stories is that they are not part of a chronology, nor are they told in the genre of a narrative autobiography, but they nevertheless open a wide field of meanings. These are a cascade of uncanny war stories that do not really end with bitter-sweet punch lines but are always expressing a welter of interrelated details; ironic traveling names, strange inexplicable incidents, humorous but tragic accidents, and images almost too horrifying to comprehend. Some of these “funny stories” do not necessarily make it into family histories, nor into the public record. Many jokes are only shared between the comrades who witnessed these events together. I heard a few of these jokes when this interviewee’s family invited me over for dinner. Before he began to speak, he closed his eyes, and his usual warm smile

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457 Anonymized 1 interview with author, field notes.
darkened into an expression of deep contemplation. In one breath, he told me about Father Christmas, an MK cadre known for his thick beard. When his platoon would patrol through villages looking for UNITA, Father Christmas would claim to be Sam Nujoma, president of SWAPO. The villagers, so the story goes, were fooled enough to give him a wide berth. In another breath, he told me about a cadre who did not receive proper prophylaxis, came down with severe recurrent malaria, later went psychotic and stripped himself naked, and was immobilized by being strapped to a bed frame by his comrades.

This story telling session ended with a knowing smile meant for him alone, and the rest of his audience more bewildered than entertained. In this brief moment, black humor was a way of expressing a wide range of sentiments and a variety of experiences that could not be expressed in a chronological narrative. But the real power of this kind of black humor lies in its delivery, which emphasized extreme juxtaposition. How do you fit this kind of humor into a narrative autobiography? How do you express it in a physical monument? Where is it in ‘struggle histories’? The argument I offer in sharing this thick description is that if the ‘funny stories’ are removed the history of armed struggle loses much of its humor, its nuance, its irony. It stops being so funny that it makes you cry.

But narrative biography can be effective when it is expressed with painful honesty and absolute candor. There are always limits to the ‘writing of life’ but one interviewee certainly pushed this genre to its outer boundary. On a long afternoon, [Anonymized 2], gave me the most complete autobiographical oral
history I collected. But the comprehensiveness and cohesion of this narrative is not its real value, it is a Bildungsroman, a chronological narrative about a journey of discovery. He began with his childhood, progressed to the political conscientization he underwent after seeing smoke billowing out of a nearby township during the Soweto uprising. He then spent his university days working with others on a highly theorized, and potentially debilitating anti-conscription movement. His activities, and the activities of others, drew the attention of the regime, and he fled for exile and completed military training in Angola. His talent for politics and commitment to the struggle quickly marked him as a high level recruit. He was sent to a secret facility in an Eastern bloc country for advanced intelligence training, then returned to a forward area where he planned a few operations, but grew increasingly disillusioned with the authoritarian culture of the command structure. He also began to have doubts about the tactical means and human costs of armed struggle. In short, he saw how close South Africa was to the knife's edge of catastrophe. The final straw came during a refresher course in Moscow during the waning days of Glasnost. His Soviet instructor, a ranking intelligence officer, revealed his longstanding doubts about the liberating potential of communism. This moment marked a sharp break the perspective of [Anonymized 2], he rejected the methods and aims adopted by the liberation struggle, but reinforced his commitment to other forms of social change. He refused direct orders to orchestrate a bombing in a crowded railway station.458

458 [Anonymized 2] interview with author, field notes.
In many ways this is not an unusual story, it follows a path familiar to many such oral histories; youthful naivete interrupted by state violence, a conversion to oppositional politics, followed by an initiation into the unique culture of the political underground and military structures. But it differs from most other oral histories in two important ways. The first is his frank description of the disillusionment felt by a once rigidly obedient cadre. But his disillusionment with the prosecution of the armed struggle did not lapse into apathy in the present day. Rather, as evidenced by his political life and his professional life, he rigorously maintained a commitment to making South Africa a better society. In this respect he lamented the fact that the ruling party may not be a vehicle for this kind of change. But, as he has commented elsewhere, and at a different time, that he still votes for the ANC, but only because there is no other party worth voting for. Still he questioned the means and ends of the armed struggle as conceived by the ANC and the military leadership of MK. This fine line of distinction is often lost among severely embittered veterans living in the townships and rural locations, as well as among the ‘true believers’ who would rather emphasize victory over ambiguity.

The other difference is the deeply personal account of the human costs of armed struggle. This interviewee postponed his interview for several months. I can only speculate why, but the emotional tenor of the entire interview suggests the difficulty of expressing a very complex set of memories. To express this dimension of the armed struggle [Anonymized 2] foregrounded the life of one friend and comrade who had trained along side him in Angola. A combination of
factors forged this friendship; the rigors of camp life, camaraderie among cadres, and the possibility for transcending racial barriers, sometimes permitted by the experience of exile. At the time, his friend was fairly young, and as a virgin, once asked [Anonymized 2] to describe sex to him. [Anonymized 2] gave the as best description he could, given the circumstances of the guerrilla camp. Later, after their paths separated, and [Anonymized 2] took his position as a military intelligence officer charged with planning internal operations, he found out that this young man had been cut down in a botched operation. [Anonymized 2] closed this chapter by mentioning that it took a very long time to reconcile himself with the memory of his friend. Only recently did he find a way of remembering his friend, after a long process of psychotherapy and personal introspection. The end product was a spiritual ritual of his own authorship that gave him some sort of communion with the past. Are these the kinds of intimate friendships that can be inscribed in two names on two stone tiles?

As I conducted several interviews with [Anonymized 3] I learned that he had at least five names. At various times and for various reasons the man I came to know as [Anonymized 3] was also known as [Anonymized 3A], [Anonymized 3B], [Anonymized 3C], and [Anonymized 3D]. Unlike [Anonymized 2], his narrative was non-linear, non-chronological. Much of this was due to the fact that when I met him, he was a severe alcoholic who, on most days, was drunk by noon. Because of this I met him as early as I could and recorded what he had to say. His interviews are meditations on claim-making in post-apartheid South.

[Anonymous 3] interviews with author, field notes.
Africa. [Anonymized 3] was part of the unruly youths who comprised the “Young Lions” of the mid-1980s. He left the country in 1985, did military training in Angola and Cuba, and served in a variety of capacities in the forward areas, seeing combat in Venda, and later receiving cadres in Lesotho. I cannot form a chronology from his stories because often they came without dates, and only vague references to the context and nature of his activities.

The thread that connected these bits of testimony was claim-making. As [Anonymized 3] told me a variety of stories about Angola and operations in the frontline states, he interpreted each as a token of commitment to the struggle. The opposite side of the coin was the sense of betrayal he felt towards the ANC, the veterans association, and some in the community. Despite this sense of betrayal one wall of his yard was spray painted with the slogan, “Viva MK, Viva ANC.” He was known as one of the “trouble-makers” who, on several occasions, called out leaders at veterans’ meetings and public events. Of the few documents he showed me, none was more powerful than a newspaper clipping of a photograph of him being pulled away from President Thabo Mbeki by ANC security. Lying beneath the surface of each of his stories was the assumption that he had been excluded from patronage because of his dissident voice and perhaps unspoken personal problems. But he maintained that he was an otherwise politically loyal cadre, committed to the principals of the ANC. At one point when showed me a letter he had written to an ANC representative, another man walked by and took the letter out of his hands. His mother, who always sat...
in on our interviews, stood up and chased the man off, yelling in Xhosa, “My son was crucified for you!”

Our interviews were tensioned by the fact that I did not believe that he was a participant in many of the stories he narrated as his own. His account of life in the Angolan camps was vivid, particularly his detailed account of hunting for game and his description of the warning cry ‘Avion, avion!’ But he told several stories that were too vague, or too elliptical to be fact checked against similar accounts. Contrary to my earlier assumptions the value of these stories lay not in their factual accounts or their value as a record of first-person experience. But rather how they express the creation of meaning, using stories that he had no doubt heard in exile and after his return home. Was his intent merely claiming memories of others to make a stronger claim on state resources and power? Or was this about creatively expressing some sense of the elliptical nature of exile by tuning to, what other exiles referred to as, ‘radio potato;’ the stories that hitched rides on supply convoys between camps, and passed along the overstretched lines of communication that bridged the internal and external structures. Was this a way of reconstructing the depth of perception of someone deep in the Angolan bush, who knew what they knew only through the stories told by others?

A few months later, [Anonymized 3] died in a ditch after pulling the tubes out of his arms and walking out of a hospital. No one told me what he died of, but rumor had it he was singing in the days before he died. At the time my

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research assistant forbade me from going to Zwelithemba because of a stabbing at a recent political rally. Several days later I asked the family if I could attend the funeral and on their invitation I drove to Zwelithemba. The leadership of the Western Cape MKMVA played a central role in eulogizing [Anonymized 3], and no doubt contributed most of the money for what was a fairly elaborate funeral. I did not play any significant role in the funeral aside from one task. The day before the funeral, the contact who introduced us asked that I scan photographs of [Anonymized 3] that he had collected from the community. This was the first and last time I was allowed into his collection in the distributive photographic archive.

All these excerpts ably represent the creative processes of story telling that memorialize the place of MK within the armed struggle. The word creative does not make them any more or less true than conventional sources, it is a recognition that people work with historical material, shape it into a format comprehensible to others, and imbue it with meaning. Authorial intent is never assured, but there is a way to read for it, even if it does not transmit itself in a simple way. At the same time, these forms are open ended enough to allow for the free play of interpretation by others. The larger point of this creative process is that oral testimony is where the really interesting and historically useful memorialization happens. Memorialization is not a location to be visited, it is a dialogue with the past.

The Triumvirate, Ghosts, and the Wilderness

As I read about and watched the last party convention and national election I counted three political contenders and several ghosts. The high point of this
drama came during the Polokwane Conference, a party-wide caucus where the ANC leadership announced the vote tallies for its next crop of party leaders. As I watched the drama unfold on stage, I was struck by the groundlings below. The behavior of the crowd at Polokwane was ambiguous. Was it a repudiation, celebration or manipulation of the history of the armed struggle, enacted as an unscripted spectacle during a painful rift in the leadership and a dire struggle for direction? As several ghosts were then summoned on stage, political entrepreneurs tried to extend the lease on their political lives by letting “slip the dogs of war.” This violent rhetoric was picked up by naïve young firebrands, who have no direct experience of the realities of armed struggle, and who shouted from a bully pulpit where once stood some of South Africa’s finest leaders. They borrowed heavily from past revolutionary rhetoric and the history of the armed struggle to threaten the judiciary, university professors, journalists, the loyal opposition within the party, disloyal opposition outside of the party, all opposition parties in general, and any and all who stood in the way of their new “revolution.” It would be a hyperbole to suggest that this was the moment when a young democracy was strangled in its crib by a bureaucratic revolution, but this violent, hateful rhetoric later spilled out into the streets. \footnote{I vividly recall seeing the white tents set up in Noordhoek that later housed those displaced by the xenophobic violence during the winter of 2008.} History is certainly is alive in South Africa, and it seems everyone is doing it these days.

The spectre of Caesar is an apt metaphor for the ghosts that frequently appeared and reappeared and were summoned to speak over the last few years. This phantasmagoria was projected all over the media and broadcast on radio.
trattoir; apocryphal stories about trafficking in drugs and stolen cars, cash-in-transit heists executed with military precision, mysterious shaped-charge explosions cracking open ATMs all over Gauteng, Gucci guerrillas with hidden investments in privatized state industries. But these are just the spooky foot soldiers. Who played the ghost of Caesar? Was it Chris Hani, cast as the fiery champion of the poor, Joe Modise, cast as the tsotsi turned Minister of Defense, or Oliver Tambo, cast as the wise grandfather of the struggle. Whoever it was, during this tumultuous year, South Africa became a haunted place where no one could escape the spectral. And, as we all now know, ghosts generally call for one of three different things; some bey for blood, some want death geld, and some pine for peace with the past.

Where I grew up I heard apocryphal tales about Vietnam veterans who returned home, but could not reintegrate into society, and left their homes for the Adirondack Mountains. As the story goes, many are still up there, living invisibly in the middle of the woods. There are many ideological problems with drawing a comparison between MK veterans and stories about Vietnam veterans but I think that veterans, broadly defined, share a few common characteristics. MK veterans constitute a group that was splintered by the post-transition dispensation. There are those who made it big, securing top posts in Eskom, elected as Ministers of Parliament, appointed to the Ministry of Defence, serving in the National Intelligence Service, and working in the corporate world. Many of these successful people are now living cheek and jowl next to the old captains of industry and old securocrats in the tonier suburbs of major cities. Apart from
these success stories, there are those who managed to adjust to a changed
country and ambiguous settlement, took regular jobs that gave them quiet middle
class lives, and now live in modest suburbs that they would have been excluded
from not more than twenty years ago. A third category includes people who
came home in a corporeal sense, but who did not come back in psychological
sense. Most often, these most damaged people now live in the townships or in
rural locations. But truth be told, not all of those living in the tonier suburbs came
back psychologically either. All three categories of people passed through this
prism when they were repatriated into South Africa or decommissioned within
South Africa.

Over the past twenty years several people have created several projects to
heal the psychic trauma of combatants still in the wilderness, some employ very
interesting postcolonial ideas, and others draw from an ever growing literature on
healing and forgiveness, most of which was adapted from the work done on the
Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Some of these project heads have
become reconciliation experts, who comprise the executive class of a sort of
peace industry, while others with a lower profile do more productive work. There
have also been some grotesquely over-funded self-help schemes, a few of which
collapsed into political slush funds.462 But participants themselves will give the
final judgment on the success or failure of all these efforts. One interviewee
expressed a refusal to participate in any more of these programs by labeling

462 The collapse of a self-help scheme in Orange Park was the most public display of corruption.
This obvious failure aside, there have been some more modestly funded success stories, such as
the Olive Farm in the Boland, and a cooperative fish farm that I heard was somewhere in
Northern Cape.
them all as “brainwashing.” His critique speaks to the socio-economic limits of psychotherapy, skills development, and self-help schemes. But the larger significance of these efforts points to the reason why MK cannot be expressed in monuments, and why memorialization is so rich with contradiction. No has figured how to address the Janus-faced nature of MK; the victory for the heroes, those who made it after the transition, and the hard reality of the anti-heroes, those who did not make it after the transition. The national idea gives no reasons why some should be remembered and others should be forgotten.
APPENDIX A
THE RULES OF SECRECY

I never gave my interviewees a single release form. I make no apologies for this, but I will provide several justifications. First and foremost among these is that the Oral History Association (of America) has yet to take seriously the ethical complexity of doing field work in Africa, particularly South Africa. Further, they have not developed the capacity to invite and fund significant numbers of scholars working at African universities, or living on the continent.

To those questioning the ethics of my practice I ask; what does a legal form look like to someone who endured the bureaucratic abuses of apartheid? What does “signing your life away” mean to someone trying to tell their story for the first and perhaps only time? What is informed consent when someone has not finished primary school and has never even seen a university or walked into a CNA? This is not to say that these individuals are unsophisticated. They are. What it means is that the Oral History Association (of America) should be conducting more empirical research on the actual conditions of fieldwork in Africa and elsewhere rather than waxing poetic about ethical guidelines that were written in a North American vacuum the 1960s. Ethics thus conceived devolves into a game of academic gotcha that generates far more heat than light. One wonders if the British Oral History Association has the same demographic and conceptual problems? From my reading of their materials and membership, I suspect not, that is why I joined them as a member.

Quite frankly the professional ethical standards of oral history as defined by some professional associations are in crisis, and have been for decades. These professional associations have not seriously taken into account changes in technology despite dozens of papers and panels on that subject, nor the complexities of conducting research outside North America. Further they are geographically and thematically parochial and biased toward certain generational, methodological and political fixations. Reflexivity, long the watchword of ethical practices in oral history, should begin at the annual meetings of the professional associations. Perhaps asking why so few members were born in Africa, or currently working on the continent, or foreign born experts on Africa attend annual meetings would be a good place to start. This is a good question to ask, because if African societies are anything, they are diversely and consistently oral. This does not demote the long tradition of writing and reading on the continent, but there is something very complex about a continent full of people who do so much talking and love to talk about the past. So, having an oral history association without a significant number of people who reside on the continent, work on the continent, or were born on the continent, regardless of their phenotype, is a bit like building a space program without electrical engineers. It is not that people of African descent or oral historians of Africa are biologically predisposed to orality, but Africa is at the heart of a complex and long thriving zone of orality, one that is both unique and familiar in equal measures. Professional organizations that overlook this world, and the people that inhabit it, do so at the peril of their own relevancy.
For these reasons, I cannot and will not in good conscience join OHA (of A) until they revise their code of ethics and improve the accessibility of their meetings for scholars living and working in Africa.

Prior to every interview, I provided informed consent, but did so orally. Giving an illiterate person an informed consent form is possibly one of the most absurd and potentially painful things I can think of. I explained everything I was about to do prior to doing the interview, and did so primarily in English, and in my broken Xhosa when necessary. I gave people the opportunity to delete their recording after the conclusion of the interview. Further, I informed them that anything they were about to tell me could appear in print. I did not offer to protect their identity, but in the process of writing I discovered that in some instances it was necessary to do so without their consent. When possible I provided interviewees with electronic copies of my notes. When possible they returned these notes with comments. Any interviewee may access their interview, after requesting to do so in writing, either via email or by mail or through an authentic intermediary carrying the proof of identity of the interviewee and the current phone number and address of the interviewee.

Insofar as these interviews are considered “out of compliance” with the ethical and professional norms laid out by the American Historical Association (AHA) and the OHA (of A), then they will remain under lock and key. If my interviewees demand that their interview be made public they may contact me by email at cosmopolitansinclosequarters@gmail.com or by mail at University of Florida, Department of History, 025 Keene-Flint Hall PO Box 117320, Gainesville
FL 32611. Interviews cleared for public access will be mailed to the interviewee in a variety of formats, audio CD, MP3, audio-cassette tape, or written transcript, when possible. Once in possession of their own interview, the interviewee may publish or publicize any and all statements therein.

Paper copies of this dissertation will be made available to any interviewee who requests it. Further I will make any and all changes on matters of fact. Recommendations on matters of inference or historical argument will be considered, and will certainly be a valuable part of all ongoing debates on this history. To borrow a worn out and historically inaccurate phrase, we live in a ‘globalized’ world. I did not interview anyone who did not have a cell phone and did not know how to use it.

Further, most of my interviewees received my business card which had my email and local number. When I ran out, I happily wrote down my number when requested. Few of my interviewees had access to a computer. But those who did not have access to a computer know those that do have access to a computer. If an interviewee reads an error in a matter of fact, or wants to engage me in a dialogue about historical argument, they may contact me or via email or mail at the above addresses. I may or may not post some of these comments online, given their value to the ongoing debate on these topics. Anonymized interviewees can request to be named provided they give their written consent and proof of identity. Anonymized interviewees who elect to reveal their given name will have their names posted alongside their pseudonyms on an as yet unconstructed website. If an anonymized interviewee has passed away,
immediate surviving family can collectively request that I reveal the given name of their deceased relative. This is based on the consensus of the family, however defined.

This dissertation will be available to any and all who want to travel to the main library at the University of the Western Cape, or the Auckland Park Bunting Road Library at the University of Johannesburg. Two copies will be sent to both libraries, where the librarians there will hopefully be gracious enough to place these copies on their shelves. When possible an electronic copy of this version will be posted online, and perhaps hosted in the digital collections of both libraries. I would be flattered by any and all comments on this text, no matter how critical. I just ask that they be empirical or at least based on some thoughtful reading of theory and evidence, whether orally transmitted or debated in writing. Email is the preferred method delivery of these comments, even if it is a somewhat less accessible way for some South Africans to communicate their comments to me.\textsuperscript{464} I cannot promise to answer all questions and comments but I will do my best. Again, questions and comments received may or may not be posted online.

I have an abiding interest in how things turn out for people. This does not mean I am an ally in making claims on the state resources and power. As I wrote earlier, this dissertation makes no partisan statement on claims on state resources or power. But I would like to see living conditions improve for all.

\textsuperscript{464} Many townships have internet cafes. It is condescending to say that people living in the townships are entirely computer illiterate, but this correction aside, computer literacy and the ‘digital divide’ is still a significant barrier to one increasingly important public sphere of democratic participation in South Africa. The government would do well to fund more computer literacy classes for both adults and children.
veterans in South Africa, regardless of their formal affiliation, or what they did or
did not do in the past.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stephen R Davis received his BA from Hamilton College in 2000. He received his MA from the University of Florida in 2006. He received his PhD from the University of Florida in 2010. He currently resides in Washington, DC.